

# Understanding the experience of out of authority educational placements for looked after children: an interpretative phenomenological analysis

Michael Chisholm

Research thesis submitted in part requirement for the  
Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at the  
University of Sheffield (DEdCPsy)

School of Education

November 2015

Word Count: 36, 303

## **Abstract**

For this thesis, qualitative research was carried out to explore the experiences of looked after children (LAC) in residential educational placements outside of their home local authority. The methodology for this research was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

To gather the data for this research, four interviews were undertaken with LAC of secondary school age. All four participants were in residential educational placements outside of their home local authorities. The interviews and analysis were carried out according to IPA guidelines, although some of the methods adopted deviated to some extent from a typical IPA approach. A diamond ranking activity was used in the interviews. The analysis of data includes an analysis of themes across cases and also presents individual synopses of the participants' accounts. The incorporation of both of these methods in the research was influenced by an earlier consideration of the use of Q methodology for this study and the reasons for retaining these elements in this research are explored in later sections of this thesis. A number of themes emerged in the analysis, which are discussed in the chapter outlining the main research findings. The ideographic nature of this research means it is not possible to draw general conclusions from the findings. However, it is argued that this research is helpful for the reflective practice of professionals working with LAC in out of authority residential educational placements. A number of key areas for professional reflection are discussed in relation to supporting LAC in out of authority residential educational placements.

## **Glossary of key terms used in this thesis**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Looked after Children (LAC)	All children and young people who have been placed in the care of the local by authority. E.g. Children in foster care; children in residential care placements.
Home local authority	The local authority where parental responsibility for a looked after child is held.
Out of authority placement	A care or educational placement for a child or young person that is outside of their home local authority.
Residential educational placement	A placement for a child or young person where they receive both care and educational provision through a single provider.

### **Abbreviations used in tables**

yr = year

m = month

# Contents

Abstract

Glossary of key terms used in this thesis

Contents

1. Introduction.....	6
2. Critical Literature Review.....	8
2.1 The research question and aims of the research.....	9
2.2 The selection of articles for the critical literature review.....	10
2.3 The outcomes of LAC in education.....	11
2.4 The case for residential educational placement for LAC.....	12
2.4.1 Concerns about residential educational placements.....	13
2.4.2 Advantages of residential educational placements.....	16
2.4.3 The outcomes of residential educational placements.....	18
2.4.4 The outcomes of residential education placements for LAC.....	20
2.5. The needs of LAC in education .....	21
2.5.1 Attachment theory.....	22
2.5.2 Resilience.....	25
2.5.3 Perspectives from neurological research.....	27
2.5.4 Maslow's hierarchy of needs.....	28
2.5.5 Ecological Systems theory.....	29
2.5.6 The construction of the identities of LAC in education.....	30
2.6 Considering LAC as a distinctive group in education.....	31
2.7 The participation of LAC in decision-making in school.....	32
2.8 The ability of LAC to construct narratives of their experiences.....	33
2.9 Rationale for undertaking this study.....	34
2.10 Summary.....	34
3. Methodology and Procedure.....	36
3.1 The aims and the epistemological position of this research.....	36
3.2 The general characteristics of the research methodology.....	37
3.2.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.....	37

3.2.2 The selection of IPA as the research methodology.....	38
3.2.3 How this study differs from a typical IPA approach.....	39
3.2.4 The theoretical underpinnings of IPA.....	40
3.2.5 The limitations of IPA research.....	43
3.3 The trustworthiness of the findings.....	44
3.4 Reflexivity .....	47
3.5 The methods used to gather data.....	48
3.5.1 The use of a diamond ranking activity .....	50
3.5.2 Generating statements for the diamond ranking activity.....	51
3.5.3 How the diamond ranking activity was used .....	53
3.5.4 Piloting.....	53
3.6 Ethical considerations.....	55
3.7 How the data was analysed.....	57
3.7.1 Choosing between a by-person analysis and an analysis across cases	56
3.7.2 The analysis used in this study.....	58
3.8 Specific procedures carried out in this study.....	59
3.8.1 Specific tools used to gather data.....	59
3.8.2 Participants.....	59
3.8.3 Procedure.....	60
3.9 Summary.....	61
4. Analysis and Findings.....	62
4.1 A description of each stage of the analysis.....	62
4.1.1 The individual analysis of each account.....	62
4.2.2 Comparing themes across cases.....	66
4.2.3 Establishing main themes across the cases.....	68
4.2.4 Writing up the analysis.....	70
4.2.5 The main themes.....	72
4.3 Discussion of themes across participants.....	74
4.3.1 A distance from home and from emotional intimacy.....	74
4.3.2 A lack of influence on the change of placement.....	78
4.3.3 Emotional support or independence and self-reliance.....	81
4.3.4 Structure, routine and boundaries.....	85

4.3.5 Normality and belonging.....	88
4.4 Individual synopses of accounts.....	90
4.4.1 Callum.....	91
4.4.2 Craig.....	92
4.4.3 Sam.....	93
4.4.4 Andrew.....	94
4.5 Summary .....	96
5 Discussion.....	98
5.1 Key areas from this research for professional reflection and discussion.....	99
5.1.1 Participation in decision-making .....	99
5.1.2 Fostering secure attachment.....	100
5.1.3 Providing Emotional containment .....	101
5.1.4 Supporting resilience.....	104
5.1.5 Providing a sense of belonging.....	105
5.1.6 The construction of the identities of LAC.....	106
5.2 The case for residential educational placements for LAC.....	106
5.3 The implications of this research.....	108
5.3.1 The microsystem.....	108
5.3.2 The mesosystem.....	109
5.3.3 The exosystem.....	110
5.3.5 Transitions.....	110
5.4 Areas for further research.....	111
5.5 Summary.....	112
6 Reflection.....	113
6.1 Limitations to this study.....	114
6.2 Learning from carrying out this study.....	115
6.2.1 The research process.....	115
6.2.2 The influence on my practice as a trainee EP.....	116
6.2.3 Work with LAC in out of authority education.....	117
6.3 Summary .....	117
7 Conclusion.....	118
8 References.....	120

9 Appendices.....	121
Appendix A: Interview Scripts.....	125
Appendix B.1 Interview schedule.....	126
Appendix B.2 Interview Schedule for Pilot Study.....	127
Appendix C.1 Statements used in diamond ranking activity.....	128
Appendix C.2 Full list of statements generated for use in the diamond ranking activity before reduction.....	129
Appendix D.1 Interview transcript for first interview (Callum) with notes.....	131
Appendix D.2 Emerging themes from interview transcript 1.....	147
Appendix E. 1 Superordinate and emergent themes in interview 1.....	148
Appendix E. 2 Superordinate and emergent themes in interview 2.....	150
Appendix E. 3 Superordinate and emergent themes in interview 3.....	152
Appendix E. 4 Superordinate and emergent themes in interview 4.....	153
Appendix F A comparison of themes across all four interviews.....	155
Appendix G A comparison of emerging themes across cases using quotations.....	157
Appendix H Participant information Sheet.....	158
Appendix I.1 Participant Consent Form.....	163
Appendix I.2 Social Worker Consent Form.....	164
Appendix I.3 Parent Consent Form.....	165
Appendix J Feedback to Participants.....	166
Appendix K Summary of Research for Settings.....	168

## **1. Introduction**

This thesis explores the experiences of Looked after Children (LAC) in out of authority educational placements. LAC may be educated outside of their home local authorities for a variety of reasons, such as a change of care placement or difficulties in school placement. Placements can be made by educational authorities, social care or they can be made jointly. LAC who are educated outside of their home local authorities are likely to be a particularly vulnerable group due to the increased level of instability in their lives and the amount of separation experienced by these children (Thomas, 2007). Some LAC are educated in day placements outside of their home local authorities whilst living inside these authorities. However, this study focuses specifically on the experiences of LAC who are in residential educational placements outside of their home local authorities.

The second chapter in this thesis is a critical literature review of the research related to LAC in out of authority educational placements. This considers research related to the placement of children and young people in residential educational settings, with particular reference to the placement of LAC in these settings. There is also a consideration of perspectives in the literature on the needs of LAC in education. At the end of this chapter, a rationale is given for conducting qualitative research that explores the views and experiences of LAC in residential educational placements outside of their home local authorities.

In the third chapter, there is a discussion of the methodology and procedure used in this study. This concerns a general discussion of the characteristics of IPA research and the reasons for adopting a methodology using IPA for this study. This chapter also outlines the way IPA was used to analyse the data in this research. In the final section of this chapter, there is a description of the specific methods that were used to carry out this study.

In the next chapter, the findings from the analysis are discussed, indicating how these emerged through a step-by-step process. There is a discussion of the themes that emerged from this process in some detail with quotations from the interviews. A synopsis of each participant's account is also presented to preserve a sense of the holistic nature of each account.



The fifth chapter discusses the findings in the context of existing research and considers the implications of findings for professionals working with LAC in out of authority placements. This chapter also discusses potential avenues for future research in this area.

In the next chapter, there is a reflection on the limitations of this study and also the researcher's own learning from carrying out this thesis. The final chapter presents a conclusion to the study, noting the main findings and potential implications of these for practice.

## **2. Critical Literature Review**

This chapter explores literature related to the educational experiences of looked after children (LAC) who are educated outside of their home local authorities. This literature review will give a background to the key areas explored in this research.

The chapter begins by introducing the research question and describing how articles were selected for this literature review. The discussion will begin with a summary of the outcomes of LAC in education. There will then be a discussion of the case for residential educational placements for LAC, highlighting key research in this area. Following this, there will be a discussion of perspectives on the needs and experiences of LAC in education, with consideration of how these perspectives could relate to the experiences of LAC in out of authority education. This is followed by a focus on other areas of specific relevance to this thesis, which include the participation of LAC in decision-making and the ability of LAC to construct narratives of their experience. This chapter finishes with a rationale for undertaking this study.

### **2.1 The research question and aims of this research**

As a qualitative study into the experiences of LAC in out of authority residential educational placements, this thesis has the following research question:

- What experiences do LAC have of out of authority residential educational placements?

The aim of this research is to gain understanding of the experiences of LAC in out of authority placements based on their own perspectives. Through exploring these perspectives, this thesis hopes to support understanding of the needs of LAC in residential educational placements. It is hoped that understanding the experiences of some LAC in residential educational placements will support understanding and professional reflection around the concerns and potential advantages of placing LAC in residential educational placements.

## **2.2 Selection of articles for the critical literature review**

Searches were carried out to identify literature related to the placement of LAC in out of authority residential educational placements. This was done using the British Education Index in October 2012. Searches were first carried out using the terms “looked after children out of authority education” and “looked after children residential education”. Articles were excluded from the literature review that considered residential care placements for LAC and not residential educational placements. However, this only produced a single article on residential education for LAC. A further search was carried out using the British Education Index using the terms “Looked after children education”. Articles were included that considered the needs, views and experiences of LAC in education. Some articles were not included as they considered specific interventions that did not relate to the areas discussed in this thesis (e.g. a home-school reading intervention, personal education plans). Articles were not included that were more than 20 years old.

At a later date, it was decided that articles on residential educational placements in general should be included in this literature review. In February 2015, the search terms “residential education” were used in the British Education Index and Google Scholar. This search identified two studies from the USA considering the outcomes of residential education programs for LAC. Studies were included in the literature review that related to the needs, outcomes or debates around residential educational programs for children with special educational needs (SEN).

Additional references related to ecological systems theory, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, attachment theory, resilience and pupil voice have also been included in the literature review. Although these perspectives were already highlighted in articles identified in the literature searches that were carried out, it was felt that the inclusion of some further literature was needed to broaden the discussion around these perspectives in this chapter. This was due to the relevance of these perspectives to the analysis of data and discussion of findings in this study in later chapters.

## **2.3 The outcomes of LAC in education**

Research suggests that within schools in the United Kingdom, LAC are identified as a priority group for receiving additional support. Fletcher-Campbell, Archer and Tomlinson (2003) found that most schools had clear pastoral structures for supporting the needs of LAC and were also using external agencies to provide additional support for this group of children. Most schools were found to have systems in place for identifying the individual needs of LAC, such as Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and tended to target extra support for LAC with SEN. The researchers found that the majority of schools had a designated teacher who was central to supporting the needs of LAC.

However, despite the high profile of LAC in education, research has consistently shown that the educational outcomes for LAC are poorer than those of their peers. Reports in the United Kingdom over a number of years have found that LAC achieve educational outcomes that are significantly below national expectations (e.g. DoH/DfE, 1995; DfEE/DoH, 2000; Ofsted, 2008). In 2006, 12 % of LAC achieved 5 A\*-C grades in GCSE examinations, whereas 59% of all children achieved this benchmark (Ofsted, 2008). In the same year, 37% of LAC did not achieve any GCSE passes, whilst this figure was only 2% of all children. A review of the data over 15 years ago found a similar pattern of school underachievement amongst LAC (McParlin, 1996). Although a report from Ofsted (2008) suggests there have been marginal improvements in the outcomes of LAC in recent years, it appears to a large extent that the gap between the educational achievements of LAC and other children remains.

The outcomes for LAC in education suggests that despite the existing level of support for this group, further work needs to be done so that LAC do not continue to fall behind their peers in terms of their educational achievements. It is within this context that residential educational placements need to be considered as a potential intervention for LAC who are experiencing difficulties in their care or educational placement.

## **2.4 The case for residential educational placements for LAC**

Residential educational placements have become increasingly common for LAC in recent years (Lee & Barth, 2009). These kinds of placements often lead to pupils being placed

outside of their home local authorities, living away from families for most or all of the year. Some children and young people may be placed in these settings full time whilst others might return home for weekends (McGill, 2008). The reasons for residential educational placements may be because of a lack of appropriate provision to meet the needs of pupils within their home local authorities or because of difficulties carers or parents have in meeting the needs of their children at home (ibid). Given the poor outcomes of many LAC in education, some writers have suggested that residential educational placements may be a promising alternative for some LAC (Lawler, Sayfan, Goodman, Narr & Cordon, 2014; Lee & Barth, 2009). This section considers the case for residential placements for LAC in settings outside of their home local authorities by exploring the concerns and potential advantages of these kind of placements.

#### **2.4.1 Concerns about residential educational placements**

To begin with, there will be a consideration of the potential concerns regarding the placement of LAC in residential educational placements. McGill (2008) argues that out of authority residential educational settings represent a failure of local authorities to meet the needs of children and young people within their home authorities. A significant concern about placing children and young people in residential educational placements is that this often involves moving them away from their families, friends and other supportive networks within the community (McGill, 2008). McGill, Tennyson & Cooper (2006) found that families were concerned about the distance of residential educational placements from home areas, with placements tending to be over 50 miles away. Families who lived further from residential educational placements tended to visit these settings less often.

Children and young people in residential educational placements may not experience close supportive relationships that are comparable to those previously experienced in their home communities. Given the distance from sources of support in home communities, this is another concern about the placement of LAC in residential educational settings. Pellicano et al. (2014) carried out interviews and focus groups with children and young people in residential educational provisions across 17 settings (n=83). Although it was found that many participants experienced close relationships whilst in their placements, some expressed concern about the depth and sustainability of these relationships. This study,

therefore, presents a mixed picture of the intimacy of relationships experienced by children and young people in residential educational placements. It is also worth noting that this study considered all children entering residential educational placements, across variety of needs. It is possible that LAC with significant emotional or behavioural needs could have more difficulty forming close and secure relationships in residential educational settings than many of the participants in this study.

A distance from systems of support and a lack of close relationships in residential educational settings could increase the vulnerability of LAC in these settings. Pilling, McGill and Cooper (2007) suggest there may be a greater risk of abuse or neglect for children in out of authority residential placements. The researchers point out that the characteristics of children in these settings (which, for many of these children, will include challenging behaviour, learning difficulties and communication difficulties) are factors that increase their vulnerability. It could be argued that the vulnerability of LAC to abuse or neglect could be increased as a result of placement in a residential educational setting as this leads to a greater distance from close contacts and potential advocates (Pilling et al., 2007). Furthermore, practices to manage behaviour in residential educational settings may include physical restraint, which also increases the risk of mistreatment (Pilling et al., 2007).

The study by Pellicano et al. (2014), however, presents a more positive picture of the security experienced by children and young people in residential educational settings. It was found that there were very few ongoing concerns regarding the safety and security of children in these settings. However, there may be a difference in the perceived risks to the children and young people in these settings and the actual risks facing them. Due to the small amount of research in this area, this is arguably a concern that needs to be considered carefully with regards to the placement of LAC in residential educational settings.

There are also challenges regarding the long term implications for LAC in residential educational settings, particularly with regards to the planning and support for the next steps for these children once they leave the placement. Pellicano et al. (2014) note that children and young people in residential educational placements are at a distance from a range of agencies and connections in their home communities, which makes it difficult to plan

transitions into further education and employment. The researchers found that, in many cases, it was difficult for the participants to maintain links with their home communities, which made the transition back to their home areas challenging. Heslop and Abbott (2008) found a variety of experiences of the transition home for children with learning difficulties returning from residential placements (n=15). Although some participants had plans in place, the researchers found that many did not have support in their local areas or future plans for further education or employment. It was found that some of the participants lacked friends and social support networks in their home areas. The concerns around the transition following a residential educational placement are arguably particularly pertinent for LAC, many of whom may be returning to areas where they have few or no relationships with supportive adults (Pellicano et al., 2014).

Another concern is that LAC may be placed in out of authority residential educational placements to meet their care needs, without consideration of their educational needs. When interviewing Educational Psychologists (EPs) who had been involved with LAC in out of authority settings, Thomson (2007) found that most of the EPs felt that these LAC had been moved to out of authority placements as a result of difficulties in their care placements. Most of the EPs felt that the educational needs of these children could have been met within their home local authorities and raised concerns that their educational needs had not been considered when the placements were decided. It is not possible to generalise these findings since this was a small scale study. The findings may also be biased from only considering the views of EPs. However, this study raises an important question of whether residential educational placements are the best or most cost effective settings to meet the needs for LAC if their needs could be met through alternative placements within their home local authorities.

Residential educational placements may sometimes be made for LAC with insufficient multi-agency planning, despite the significant implications of these placements for both the care and educational experiences of LAC. Thomson (2007) found that the decisions for LAC to be moved to out of authority placements were made, in many cases, without multi-agency involvement. It was found that a lack of joint planning and co-ordinated activity between educational and social care professionals led to decisions being made regarding changes of

placement without EP involvement. This suggests that more joint planning may be needed around the placement of some LAC entering out of authority educational placements.

The placement of LAC in out of authority provision could make multi-agency working more challenging due to the geographical distance between professionals supporting these children. Research suggests that effective multi-agency working around LAC is important to promote positive outcomes for this group (Harker, Dobel-Ober, Berridge, & Sinclair, 2004). However, the placement of LAC in out of authority settings could mean that effective multi-agency working is less common for these children.

Research suggests that support for LAC is considered a priority area for EPs, but may be restricted due to competing demands from other work (Norwich, Richards & Nash, 2010). However, the support that LAC attending residential educational placements receive from Educational Psychology Services and other agencies could be reduced because of the distance of these LAC from their home local authorities. Morris, Abbott and Ward (2003) found that many parents were frustrated by the lack of attendance of professionals from local authorities at annual reviews once children and young people had moved into out of authority placements. It was found there was a lack of follow-up work from EPs following the change of placement. Therefore, the distance of LAC in residential educational placements from supportive professionals in their home authorities is another concern about these placements.

A final concern raised about residential educational placements is their financial cost (McGill, 2008). Due to the high staff to pupil ratios in these settings, the cost of residential education is expensive for local authorities (Pilling et al., 2007). Given the availability of other supporting services for LAC within local authorities, it may be difficult to justify the expense of out of authority residential placements for LAC (Lee & Barth, 2009).

#### **2.4.2 Advantages of residential educational placements**

Lee and Barth (2009) note the dissimilarities between residential educational settings and residential treatment centres in the USA, pointing out that residential educational placements tend to be longer term and are often based around family style living



arrangements. One potential advantage of residential education placements is that they can offer stable long term placements for LAC, which could support their educational outcomes and personal development (Lee & Barth, 2009). Break downs and difficulties in care placements for LAC can be a significant contributing factor to experiencing difficulties in school (e.g. Brewin & Statham, 2011). In particular, instability in care placements has been found to be a factor that is linked to poor attendance in school for LAC (Northern Ireland DfE, 2011). Residential education programs could be a way of giving some LAC a more stable placement, which could support their engagement in education.

Some writers have pointed out advantages in the resources offered by residential educational settings for children and young people with a high level of need. These include that they: offer flexible programs (Lee & Barth, 2009); give opportunities for a range of extra-curricular activities (Lee & Barth, 2009; Hallet, Hallet & McAteer, 2007); give access to staff with expertise in working with children with high levels of SEN (Hallet et al., 2007) and offer smaller class sizes and high staffing ratios (Lee & Barth, 2009). These aspects of residential educational programmes could be beneficial to some LAC. However, it could be argued that support of this kind should be available in the home local authorities of LAC. Therefore, these potential benefits of residential educational placements may not entirely justify the placement of LAC in these kinds of placements.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of residential educational provision is that it offers wrap-around continuity of support across care and education (Ainsworth & Hansen, 2005; Pilling et al., 2007). It is arguably this continuity of provision that could be of benefit to some LAC. The continuity and stability of care and educational provision could provide a high level of structure and stability for children and young people with challenging behaviour and emotional difficulties (Pilling et al., 2007). This could potentially provide valuable support to LAC who need a high level of support and stability to help them manage their feelings and behaviour.

### **2.4.3 The outcomes of residential educational placements**

Some studies consider the outcomes from residential educational placements for children and young people with SEN across a range of needs. Consideration of these studies could help to further explore the potential costs and benefits of residential education placements for LAC.

Recent research by Pellicano et al. (2014) explored the views of children and young people in residential educational placements on their experiences in their placements (n=83). The researchers found that, on the whole, participants expressed satisfaction with both the care and educational aspects of their placements. In many cases, the participants noted that they felt their needs were responded to more effectively than in previous placements. Most participants reported feeling safe and secure in their placements, although some expressed concerns about the effect of the behaviour of others or their own behaviour on their personal safety. The researchers also found that parents, carers and Teachers reported a shortage of support for complex mental health needs for the children in these settings.

On the whole, the findings from Pellicano et al. (2014) offer tentative support for residential educational placements for some children and young people who have educational and care needs that are not being met within their home local authorities. However, it is not clear what the selection criteria was for participants in this study: potential participants who were experiencing very challenging circumstances may not have been interviewed on ethical grounds, which could have skewed the findings. Furthermore, without individual case studies, it is also difficult to see how some of the dilemmas of residential educational placements effected participants differently across the sample. There may be have been some participants who adapted well to the placements but others who experienced significant hardship. However, this is not clear from the study. Nonetheless, Pellicano et al.'s (2014) research offers some insight into the potential benefits of residential educational placements, which could be applicable to some LAC.

Jahnukainen (2007) explored the narratives of young people leaving residential educational placements in Finland (n=52). The researcher found that there was a range of pathways for young people leaving these placements: some participants settled into stable living

arrangements and jobs; some became moderately well integrated into society and others experienced persistent problems related to drugs, crime and unemployment. Jahnukainen (2007) challenges the negative associations of residential education that are held in Finland, noting that the range of pathways for young people following these placements suggests that they may be successful in some cases. However, the difficulties experienced by some of the participants following residential educational placements suggests that some of the placements were unsuccessful. Unfortunately, it is difficult to compare these findings with those from other studies on residential educational placements, since there are very few details given of the characteristics of the residential educational settings that the participants attended or of the participants themselves.

There is some evidence from small scale qualitative research of positive outcomes from residential educational placements for younger children regarded as having emotional and behaviour difficulties. Harris, Barlow & Moli (2007) found that a residential educational program had a positive impact on primary aged pupils (n =5) in terms of: improved behaviour; increased ability of participants in managing and regulating feelings and improvements in participants' self-esteem and relationships with others. However, there is no control in this study to provide a point of comparison and it is not possible to generalise findings from such a small sample.

A less positive impression of the outcomes of residential education for young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties is presented in a study by Hornby and Witte (2007) based on the views of participants who attended a residential education setting in New Zealand (n=29). The researchers found that participants experienced low levels of achievement following the placement and reported being involved in high levels of crime, experiencing unemployment and having difficulties adjusting to life in their home communities. It is important to note, however, that these findings concern students who were in the setting between 1989 and 1992. It is possible that this provision does not reflect current practice in residential education settings.

Taken together, these studies offer tentative support for residential educational placements for children and young people with a range of needs. However, the studies discussed also suggest that some children and young people experience difficulties in these placements.

#### **2.4.4 The outcomes of residential educational placements for LAC**

Whilst there still needs to be more rigorous research on the outcomes for LAC in residential educational placements, there is some evidence starting to emerge in support of the effectiveness of these placements for LAC. Two studies consider the outcomes for LAC attending a residential educational setting in California, 'The Academy'. This setting is specifically for LAC of secondary school age. In this setting, the LAC are accommodated in family style living arrangements and are typically placed in the setting for long periods, in many cases remaining in the setting until graduation (Lawler et al., 2014). Lawler et al. (2014) considered data held by 'The Academy' on the outcomes of LAC who attended the setting between 2002 and 2012 (n= 478). It was found that graduation rates of students in the placement far exceeded those of the general population of LAC in California based on data from comparable studies. Similarly, a higher proportion of students leaving the academy were found to go on to higher education than general populations of LAC. Duration of stay at 'The Academy' was found to be positively correlated with measures of well-being, close adult relationships and rates of employment. Further to this, an earlier study by Jones & Landsverk (2005) found higher rates of graduation and enrolment in further education programs for LAC attending 'The Academy' (n=42) in comparison to LAC in general populations, based on comparable studies.

These studies give some evidence of the potential positive outcomes of residential educational programs for LAC. Lawler et al. (2014) argue that these benefits are likely to be influenced by the long-term stability of the placements. However, there are difficulties in generalising the findings from the above studies. The data from both studies are limited by the absence of control groups to provide a meaningful comparison of outcomes. It is also difficult to generalise from these findings to other residential educational settings which may offer a different kind of provision to 'The Academy' and may vary in terms of the

characteristics of the children and young people attending these settings. Additionally, the admission criteria for prospective students at 'The Academy' include that they should not present with significant mental health difficulties or have a recent history of assault and should be able to make use of a high quality education program. It is possible, therefore, that the positive outcomes identified for students attending 'The Academy' could have been influenced by admission procedures that prevented LAC with the highest level of need from attending the setting.

It is also important that quantitative data is not considered in isolation, without perspectives that give an indication of the qualitative experiences of LAC in residential educational settings. For example, the data from the above studies does not give any indication of the lived experiences that LAC had of attending the Academy, including their feelings related to being placed away from their home locality and families. Despite these limitations, however, the above studies give tentative support towards the feasibility of residential educational placements for LAC of secondary school age.

*Summary of this section.* From the studies discussed, there are clearly dilemmas around the placement of LAC in residential educational settings. Although there is some tentative evidence of positive outcomes for LAC in residential educational placements, it is hard to generalise findings from existing research. It is also not clear why some children and young people experience successful outcomes from residential placements and others do not. More rigorous research is needed on the outcomes of residential educational programs for LAC. There is also a gap in the research base regarding studies that specifically consider the views of LAC on their experiences of residential educational placements.

## **2.5 The needs of LAC in education**

In order to further consider the dilemmas around residential educational placements for LAC, this section considers perspectives from the literature on the needs of LAC in education. These perspectives are considered in relation to the case for residential educational placements for LAC. This discussion should also help to shed light on the ways

that LAC may need to be supported in residential educational settings for these placements to be successful.

### **2.5.1 Attachment theory**

Attachment theory provides a perspective, from a psychodynamic point of view, that could potentially help support our understanding the needs of LAC in education (Dent & Cameron, 2003). This section will begin with a discussion of Bowlby's (1953) attachment theory and the way it has been developed by other researchers.

Bowlby's (1953) attachment theory suggests that infants are born with an innate ability to seek out their primary caregiver. According to this theory, infants are able to seek support for their emotional, physical and survival needs from the adults on whom they depend. In Bowlby's view, when primary caregivers are sensitive and responsive to the proximity-seeking behaviour and care needs of infants, secure attachments will be formed. However, where parents do not respond to meet an infant's needs or respond in a highly anxious way, it is suggested that the infant will become insecurely attached (Bowlby, 1953).

According to this theory, it is through secure attachment to a primary caregiver that children develop a range of adaptive behaviours, such as: feelings of self-worth; the ability to manage difficult emotions and the ability to form close relationships with others (Dent & Cameron, 2003). Bowlby suggests that the kind of attachment relationship that infants form with primary caregivers affects largely subconscious representations that the infant has of themselves and the world, which are described as internal working models (Bowlby, 1969). In Bowlby's view, these internal working models form the basis of predictions that children make about the future as well as their choices of behaviour in particular situations.

There has been significant theoretical development to attachment theory through the work of Ainsworth (e.g. Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978). Through studying the patterns of behaviour of infants in the home, Ainsworth et al. (1978) proposed that attachment figures provide a secure base from which infants can explore the world. The researchers suggest there are three different styles of attachment, arguing that these underpin the

different patterns of behaviour that infants show in response to separation and stressful situations. These types are: secure; anxious-avoidant and anxious ambivalent attachments.

Secure infants are upset when separated from primary caregivers and engage in comfort seeking behaviours in stressful situations. They are soon comforted by responsive parents (Ainsworth et al. 1978). Ambivalent infants become very agitated or upset in stressful situations. They show mixed feelings towards attachment figures: these infants display a preoccupation with attachment figures but are not comforted easily by them (ibid). Infants with an avoidant style do not show upset feelings when separated from caregivers. They tend to avoid proximity with the caregiver when distressed or upon reunion (ibid). A fourth category of attachment, referred to as disorganised-disorientated, has been proposed by later researchers to describe the behaviour of infants who do not show consistent patterns of behaviour in response to stress or separation (e.g. Crittenden, 1985).

According to attachment theory, these early attachments form the basis of patterns of significant relationships and behaviour in response to difficult situations throughout childhood. On this basis, attachment theory provides a potentially useful way of understanding the behaviour and experiences of LAC in education, many of whom may well have formed insecure attachments to primary caregivers in their early years of life (Slater, 2007). Insecure attachment to primary caregivers could influence the way that some LAC form relationships with adults and respond to difficult situations in school. This may well have implications for the support that many LAC need in school.

Attachment theory provides a useful perspective that may help to understand the behaviour of insecurely attached children in school, who may be either avoidant of adults or overly controlling, according to their attachment style. (E.g. Geddes, 2006). Insecurely attached children may also have impaired cognitive functioning, such as impaired executive functioning and metacognitive abilities, which could make regulation of feelings more difficult (Greig et al., 2008). This suggests that educational placements are likely to need to provide LAC with a secure base and offer support to help these children learn to manage and regulate their feelings (ibid). Dent & Cameron (2003) point out that early attachment difficulties could make the potentially stressful experiences that are common in school

environments more difficult for LAC. Greig et al. (2008) note that LAC are likely to need more support in areas of learning that require reflection on feelings and experiences in comparison to their peers. This could well have implications for the support needed by LAC in residential educational placements.

It is also important to consider the potential value of secondary attachment figures in education for LAC. A secondary attachment figure refers to an adult outside of the home who is able to take on the role of an attachment figure for a child or young person (Ryzin, 2010). Ainsworth (1989) suggests there is a likely possibility that Teachers, mentors or even sports coaches could act as 'parental surrogates' for children and young people who do not experience sufficient responsiveness to their emotional needs at home.

A study by Ryzin (2010) also lends some support to the potential importance of secondary attachment figures in education. In a large sample (n=209), it was found that 40% of students named adults who were in an advisory role as attachment figures. Where students did not name their mothers as attachment figures, naming the advisor as an attachment figure was a strong predictor of academic success and emotional adjustment. This study, however, was with a general population and may not apply to LAC in particular. Additionally, it's not possible to deduce a causal relationship between secondary attachment figures and academic success as there is no control group in this study.

Nonetheless, the above research lends some tentative support to the idea that secondary attachment figures could provide a valuable role in supporting positive outcomes for LAC in education. Furthermore, Jackson and Martin (1998) found that LAC who are successful in education highlighted the importance of the presence of a significant adult or mentor to give encouragement (n=38). One possible interpretation is that the supportive adults identified by participants in this study acted as secondary attachment figures for these LAC.

There are some difficulties, however, with the use of attachment theory to support understanding of the needs of LAC in education. Slater (2007) notes that reservations about the use of attachment theory include that it promotes a deficit view of LAC and that it leads to 'within child' explanations for the difficulties experienced by LAC in school, ignoring



systemic factors within the home, school and community that also influence development. Furthermore, the use of attachment theory could inhibit our view of the richness and variety in the experiences of LAC in education. This could overlook other important perspectives that should also be considered in planning support for LAC in school, such as their strengths and aspirations. As a result, attachment theory could potentially foster negative expectations and could be a barrier to creative and thoughtful approaches to supporting LAC (Slater, 2007).

Attachment theory, therefore, may provide a perspective that helps us to better understand the needs of LAC but may need to be used with some caution. Understanding different attachment styles could help us to understand the different ways that LAC may be supported most effectively in their emotional and personal development whilst in residential educational placements. Secondary attachment figures could also be important for LAC in educational placements outside of their home local authority. It is arguably a potential strength of residential educational placements that the stability of these placements could provide the opportunity for LAC to develop secure attachments to secondary attachment figures within these settings. However, placement in out of authority residential settings is also likely to move LAC away from attachment figures in their home locality, which could be distressing or potentially harmful to their development.

### **2.5.2 Resilience**

The concept of resilience is another theoretical perspective that could help us to understand of the needs of LAC in education. Resilience refers to the developmental pathway on which people experience positive life outcomes (e.g. related to employment, housing and mental health) despite experiencing difficult circumstances in earlier life (e.g. Rutter, 1987). LAC are sometimes described as being resilient when they experience positive life outcomes in spite of the difficulties in their earlier lives and the trauma of being separated from their parents (Dent & Cameron, 2003). The factors in people's lives that promote resilience can be referred to as protective factors. Understanding the potentially protective factors in the lives of LAC could help our understanding of the issues and dilemmas related to residential educational placements for LAC.

Dent and Cameron (2003) note that there is a strong correlation (in general populations) between success in education and success in other life areas. This highlights the potential importance of success in education to promote the resilience of LAC. Research by Jackson and Martin (1998) found that LAC who become higher-achieving adults also experienced success in education. This suggests that interventions for LAC should promote positive educational outcomes. In light of this, residential educational programmes could be considered as promoting the resilience of LAC if they are able to improve their educational outcomes. However, this factor arguably should not be considered as promoting resilience in isolation from the other outcomes of LAC in these placements, such as their social and personal development.

A number of researchers have highlighted factors that should promote the educational achievement of LAC. It has been argued that there needs to be early intervention for LAC (Ofsted, 2008; Dent & Cameron, 2003) and support for these children to be active participants in their learning (Gilligan, 2007; Dan, 2011). Jackson & Martin (1998) found that factors promoting the success in education for LAC include: belonging to a friendship group of educationally successful peers; receiving encouragement from carers; access to higher education; intrinsic motivation to learn and self-efficacy. In a further study with higher achieving LAC, Martin and Jackson (2002) found that participants benefited from receiving support and encouragement for academic achievement from teachers and identified barriers to achievement in school as being low expectations and negative stereotypes of LAC held by adults. Ofsted (2008) highlight the importance of engaging LAC in extra-curricular activities and involving carers in education plans.

Together, these findings suggest that residential programs may benefit from: being an early form of intervention; having an emphasis on the importance of the academic success of LAC; providing high expectations for learning; providing support for LAC to be active participants in learning; using approaches to support motivation and self-efficacy and offering a range of extra-curricular activities. However, further research exploring the role of these factors more rigorously would be helpful.

Some writers argue that secure attachment figures in educational and care settings are potentially protective factors for LAC (Dent & Cameron, 2003; Gilligan, 2007). However, It could also be argued that residential education could increase the risk to LAC from the distance of LAC in these settings from potentially supportive networks and secure attachment figures in their home local authorities. The potential value of secondary attachment figures for LAC in residential settings has been discussed earlier.

Another process that may mediate the resilience of LAC is authoritative parenting (Dent & Cameron, 2003). This perspective derives from Baumrind's (1991) research into the effects of different styles of parenting on children's development. Baumrind found that parental approaches to discipline vary in terms of the level of expectations placed on children and the responsiveness of parents to their children. The most successful parenting style was described as authoritative parenting: a style that combines high expectations and secure boundaries with a responsiveness and sensitivity to the child. It was found that this approach leads to the development of positive characteristics, such as increased social responsibility and friendliness. Dent and Cameron (2003) argue that Baumrind's findings have implications for the type of parenting LAC should receive, suggesting that authoritative parenting could promote the resilience of LAC.

Baumrind's research, therefore, could provide a useful perspective on the support LAC need within the pastoral and living arrangements of residential educational settings. These placements could be an opportunity to provide a consistent authoritative approach to supporting LAC with their feelings and behaviour. However, it is important to note that Baumrind's theory offers a perspective on parenting that is intended for general populations. This approach may not so easily be applicable to vulnerable LAC, who may have challenging behavioural and emotional needs.

In summary, residential education could be an intervention that promotes the resilience of LAC by promoting positive educational outcomes, fostering secure attachment and providing authoritative parenting. However, further research is needed to support these claims.

### **2.5.3 Perspectives from neurological research**

The early life experiences of LAC could have an influence on their neurological development, leading to difficulties managing and regulating feelings in school (Dann, 2011). A number of studies suggest that there is a particularly sensitive period for brain development in the first three years of life (ibid). Stressful experiences in these years could have a negative impact on neurological development. For example, some research links stressful early life experiences to changes in the limbic system, a region of the brain that is thought to be involved in regulating emotions and executive functioning (Perry, in Cairns, 2002; Gerhardt, 2004). Given that many LAC have experienced challenging circumstances in early life, including severe neglect and abuse, this could result in a harmful effect on the development of brain regions that support the management and regulation of feelings for some LAC.

Dann (2011) argues that LAC need supportive environments, in which adults support them to learn to regulate their feelings. This could have implications for the way that adults respond to challenging behaviour from LAC in educational settings. Neurological research highlights the importance of educational staff understanding the underlying reasons for the challenging behaviour of some LAC in school, rather than labelling these children as being 'naughty' (Dann, 2011).

This perspective, therefore, could highlight the importance of staff in residential educational settings in supporting LAC learn to manage and regulate their feelings. However, this perspective should arguably be used cautiously since it could be seen as only presenting a deficit view of LAC. It could also lead to generalising assumptions about the emotional experiences of all LAC that do not reflect the range of individual experiences of these children.

### **2.5.4 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

Gilligan (2007) argues that LAC need to feel a sense of belonging in school, feeling that they are part of the school community. It is argued that this sense of belonging can enable LAC to feel valued as learners and become active participants in their learning. Some research into good practice for LAC in education also highlights the importance of LAC not standing out

from peers (Ofsted, 2008; Brewin & Statham, 2011). This could be seen as reflecting the need for LAC to experience a sense of belonging in school.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs provides a theoretical perspective that could support this argument (Maslow, 1968). Maslow's theory aims to explain the motivation behind human behaviour based on a hierarchical structure of holistic needs. This theory is still well regarded (e.g. Koltco-Rivera, 2006). According to Maslow, people are motivated to meet their basic physiological and safety needs before moving on to higher needs, such as their need for belonging and their self-esteem needs. It could follow from this that difficulties in school can arise where children and young people don't feel a sense of belonging in school and try to meet this need in unacceptable ways (Porter, 2014).

This could have implications for LAC in out of authority residential placements. Being away from home could influence the sense of belonging of LAC in the school community, resulting in a difficult experience and perhaps preventing a focus on meeting higher needs related to their academic progress. It may be important, therefore, that residential educational placements are able to foster a sense of belonging for LAC in these settings. This perspective also suggests that the risk of singling out LAC in residential settings should be minimised to support the sense of belonging of LAC in these settings. However, it is worth noting that no research evidence was identified that specifically explores the experience of belonging and acceptance for LAC in education based on their own perspectives. Further research, therefore, would be helpful to support this argument.

### **2.5.5 Ecological Systems Theory**

A further theoretical perspective that could help us to consider the needs of LAC in out of authority educational placements more broadly is Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. This perspective considers the influence on child development of systemic factors at a range of ecological levels, beyond the dyad of children and their primary caregivers. Ecological systems theory is a potentially useful framework for exploring factors at different levels that are needed to support positive outcomes for LAC in out of authority residential placements.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that a child's development is influenced by interactions between the individual child and a number of environmental systems, which include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. A change in one system exerts an influence on other systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

- The microsystem is an individual's immediate environment and encompasses their home, school and familiar settings within the community.
- The mesosystem contains the relationships between different aspects of the microsystem: changes in one aspect are likely to influence changes in another area. The relationships between different parts of the microsystem are referred to as the mesosystem.
- The exosystem includes social contexts that exert an influence on the child's microsystem, but with which the child does not directly interact. For example, parents' places of work, local policies and social services.
- The macrosystem is the overarching cultural knowledge and institutional patterns of behaviours within the culture that the child lives in.

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

For LAC in residential educational settings, the microsystem could be seen as including: the characteristics of the child's peer group and staff; the physical environment; approaches to discipline in the setting; staff-to pupil ratios and extra-curricular activities. The exosystem includes: support from outside agencies; staff training and development; local authority initiatives and policy; the availability of funding and resources as well as factors affecting family members or carers in the child's home local authority.

This perspective highlights the way in which a range of environmental contexts are likely to influence the outcomes of LAC in education and could be helpful, therefore, in considering the support needed at a variety of levels for LAC in residential educational settings. It has been used to support the understanding of transitions for LAC in education (Brewin & Statham, 2011) and provides a potential framework to support understanding of the needs of LAC in residential educational placements at a range of levels.

### **2.5.6 The construction of the identities of LAC in education**

Some research highlights the way that professional voices can construct the identities of LAC. Phillips (2003) investigated the way professionals had written about a looked after child (Sean) in an Educational Psychology file and the way he was spoken about in discussion with members of a multi-disciplinary team. The researcher took a reflexive approach by analysing her own account of Sean's life, which was written following a reading of the file. Phillips notes that in her writing she found previously unidentified prejudices and assumptions about the subjects in the text. For example, the researcher found examples of polarised thinking in the way she described Sean's family life, which was depicted as involving arguments and disputes, as opposed to care and supportive relationships. It was noted how Sean's mother was depicted as being passive, struggling for help and dishonest, which was in contrast with the view of professionals in this account, who were presented as assertive, competent and honest. Phillips notes that these constructions do not reflect the more likely presence of a diverse range of both positive and negative experiences in Sean's family life. The researcher also reflects on the absence of Sean's own voice in her text.

This research highlights the way assumptions and polarised thinking could potentially influence or distort views on LAC in education. Phillips (2003) stresses the importance of professionals reflecting on their own assumptions and advocates deconstruction of the language used in reports and professional dialogues about LAC as a way of supporting this reflection. There may be a need to reflect carefully on the narratives of LAC in residential education: problem-saturated or reductive narratives could lead to a lack of creativity in planning and problem-solving around these children and young people. This could have implications for professionals working with LAC in residential educational placements, highlighting the importance of exploring the richness of their experiences and also of understanding areas of strength. The narratives around LAC may also influence decisions to place these children in out of authority residential placements. This suggests that the narratives created around LAC need to be reflected on carefully, with consideration of the ways in which these narratives construct the identities of LAC.

## **2.6 Considering LAC as a distinctive group in education**

In considering perspectives on the needs of LAC in education, there are difficulties with trying to understand the needs of LAC as a homogenous group, given the large variety in the needs of children belonging to this group. It could be argued, therefore, that a general understanding of the needs of LAC could be unhelpful since planning and support for these children needs to be based around the needs of individuals. This point has been made by with regards to good practice in schools for LAC (Ofsted, 2008) and support for the transitions of LAC between educational settings (Brewin & Statham, 2011).

It is also likely that there is a wide variety of experiences of LAC in residential educational placements. This presents a challenge for the present study, which aims to support understanding of the experiences of LAC in out of authority residential educational placements as a distinctive group. There is a tension in this research, therefore, between the aim of understanding the experiences of LAC as a distinctive group and a recognition of the potential diversity in the range of experiences of LAC in out of authority residential educational placements.

## **2.7 The participation of LAC in decision-making in school**

The extent to which LAC have been able to contribute to the decision to move to an out of authority placement is an aspect of their experience that is of interest in this research, This relates to the current emphasis within education towards the importance of pupil voice (DoE/ DoH, 2014). Ofsted (2008) also highlight the importance of the engagement of LAC in decisions made in school. The contribution of LAC to important decisions can be considered in relation to the right held by all children to participate in the decisions that influence their lives (United Nations, 1990).

However, some research suggests that LAC often have limited involvement in decision making processes and that LAC report they would like to have more influence on decisions in education (Thomas & O’Kane, 1999). Recent research exploring the views of children and young people in residential educational placements also found that that there was a lack of



participation in key decisions, such as the decision to move to the placement (Pellicano et al., 2014).

It is important to consider the reasons why LAC may not be included in decisions that affect their lives. In a study by Thomas and O' Kane (1999), the researchers found that, in many cases, carers held a view that LAC do not have the capacity to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. Thomas and O'Kane (1999) argue that some carers seemed to have a 'medical' construction of the needs of LAC as they felt LAC needed to be 'treated' rather than engaged as active participants, which prevented them from being meaningfully included in decision making. Although the above research is now over a decade old, it seems plausible that beliefs about the ability of LAC to contribute to decisions may continue to be a barrier to the active participation of these children in important decisions. This could potentially affect the participation of LAC in decisions related to placement in out of authority residential educational provision.

In decisions around the placement of LAC, there may be a tension between trying to give these children agency in their lives and the role of responsible adults in making decisions that are felt to be in the best interests of LAC. This could involve making decisions to change placement, even when this is against the wishes of the children themselves. Mantle (2007) notes this tension in decisions related to the placement of children following family court hearings: it is important to recognise the views of children in this process but this needs to be balanced with protecting them from situations that are potentially harmful. This tension has also been noted with regards to debates around the participation of children and young people in decisions affecting their education (e.g. Burden, 1997; Norwich & Kelly, 2007).

There may be a dilemma, therefore, regarding the participation of LAC in decisions related to placement in out of authority residential educational provision. Professionals may want to protect LAC from risks in their current situations, such as continued instability in care placements or non-attendance in education. In some cases, the arguments in favour of residential educational provision could be in conflict with the wishes of LAC if they would prefer to remain in their home area.

## **2.8 The ability of LAC to construct narratives of their experience**

Some research suggests that LAC may have difficulty in constructing coherent narratives of their experiences (Greig et al., 2008). This has potential implications for the present study, with regards to the ability of participants to present narratives of their experience in an interview. Greig et al. (2008) investigated the ability of LAC of primary school age to organise and represent interpersonal and emotive material through studying the coherence of narratives they produced in response to a range of scenarios. The researchers found less coherence in the narratives of LAC of their experiences in comparison to their peers.

These findings highlighted a potential challenge during the planning stage of this research, given that interviews were to be carried with LAC about their experiences. It was anticipated that participants could have difficulty talking about personal experiences of residential education, finding it difficult to represent and organise this emotive kind of material. This suggested that interview methods would need to be adapted to support participants in talking about their experiences. However, it is worth noting that the research by Greig et al. (2008) considered a small sample of primary school aged pupils and may not, therefore, be representative of LAC of secondary school age.

## **2.9 Rationale for this study**

Given the increasing use of residential educational settings for LAC in placements outside of their home local authorities, there is a need for further research into this area. The current evidence base for the efficacy of these placements is limited: only two published studies were identified that relate to the outcomes of LAC in residential education settings. There are also no published studies considering the views and experiences of LAC in these settings. There is a gap, therefore, in the existing research base with regards to understanding the experiences of LAC in residential educational placements and perspectives that could support LAC in these placements.

This research was carried out, therefore, to explore the experiences of LAC in residential educational settings based on their own perspectives. It is intended that this research will

support professional reflection on the issues and dilemmas related to the placement of LAC in residential educational provision and support understanding of the needs of LAC in these settings. As stated earlier, the research question is 'What are the experiences of LAC in out of authority residential educational placements?'

## **2.10 Summary**

This study aims to support professional reflection and discussion around the placement of LAC in residential educational settings and the experiences of LAC in these placements. This chapter has considered the case for residential educational placements for LAC. A potential advantage of these placements is the stability they could offer to some LAC. However there are a number of concerns about residential educational placements for LAC, particularly in relation to the difficulties that may arise from moving LAC away from their home areas and supportive networks. A number of perspectives have also been discussed which could support understanding of the experiences of LAC in residential educational placements, including attachment theory and resilience.

### **3 Methodology and Procedure**

This chapter will describe the methodology used for this study, which was IPA, a form of qualitative enquiry. There will also be a discussion of the reasons for adopting this approach as opposed to other potential methodologies and the ways in which this study deviates from a typical IPA approach. The discussion in this chapter will consider the type of data gathered in this research and why this was relevant to the research question. The philosophical perspectives that inform IPA will be considered in order to convey a deeper understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of this study, including the nature of the enquiry and the kind of knowledge that is being constructed.

In the final part of this chapter, there will be a description of the specific methods used to carry out this research, including the identification of participants and the methods used to gather this data. An overview of the processes involved in analysing the data is also covered in this chapter.

#### **3.1 The aims and the epistemological position of this research**

This research aims to explore the experiences of LAC in residential educational programs outside of their home local authorities, by asking:

‘What are the experiences of LAC in out of authority residential educational placements?’

By exploring the experiences of a small number of LAC in these placements in detail, it is intended that this research will help to develop professional reflection about this topic. It is hoped that this research will support consideration of the issues and dilemmas related to residential educational placements for LAC and support understanding of the ways that LAC may need to be supported in placements of this kind. This research could also help to generate questions for future research related to LAC in these placements.

The above research aims can now be considered in terms of the epistemological position being taken in this study. The Epistemological position of a piece of research refers to the kind of knowledge being generated by the research and helps us to understand the way that

the study intends to construct knowledge, how this knowledge can be verified or how far it can be considered trustworthy (Kvale, 2007). The present research has a relativist epistemology. This means that the findings from the research are not objectively verifiable. The findings can only be seen in any sense to be true relative to the participants in the study and their own experiences (as well the interpretative position of the researcher-see later discussion). Knowledge from research with a relativist epistemology can be used to develop new ways of thinking about a topic and develop existing theories, which can then be tested out through a scientific, experimental approach if this is possible (Willig, 2001). The position adopted in this research contrasts with a realist epistemology, which aims to find truths that are objectively verifiable, being independent of any observer (Willig, 2001).

This thesis, therefore, is concerned with exploring new ways of thinking about and understanding the experiences of LAC in residential educational settings. The aim of the research is not to evaluate the outcomes of residential educational placements in general and the findings are not intended to be generalised to all LAC in residential educational settings.

As this study is concerned with the creation of new ways of thinking about this area, it can be described as being inductive research. This contrasts with a deductive approach, which would involve testing out a particular theory or hypothesis. This research could also be described as ideographic as it involves the exploration of a small number of cases in depth to promote understanding, without the aim of generalising findings (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). This is opposed to nomothetic research, which attempts to find out characteristics and trends across general classes or populations.

## **3.2 The general characteristics of the research methodology**

### **3.2.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

IPA is concerned with the way individuals make sense of their lived experiences and the individual meanings they give to them (Smith & Osborn, 2003). It requires researchers to try to make sense of the meanings participants give to their experiences through engaging with the accounts they give of their lived experiences (ibid). IPA is an inductive approach to

research as it is concerned with understanding lived experiences in fresh and insightful ways. It is concerned with the individual voices and lived experiences of participants, as well as how these can be extended to themes and patterns across cases (Willig, 2001). Typically, IPA research involves the accumulation of data from interviews with a relatively small number of participants or even a single participant (ibid).

### **3.2.2 The selection of IPA as the research methodology**

The starting point for choosing a methodology was to select an approach that would allow an exploration of the views of LAC on their experiences of out of authority residential education. This presented a range of options for the research methodology. It was decided that the research should be qualitative since it has the purpose of exploring viewpoints rather than testing a given hypothesis or establishing a particular pattern of behaviour. Qualitative research involves an in depth exploration of an area, looking for insights that may be unexpected or that shed a new light on existing ideas and theories (Kvale, 2007). These aspects fitted with the aims of this research described earlier in this chapter.

There were a number of advantages to using IPA in this research. Firstly, IPA has a focus on the lived experiences of participants (Smith et al., 2009). This was a good basis for a study with the aim of exploring the views and experiences of LAC in out of authority education. A second reason was that IPA acknowledges the 'realness' of the experiences of participants, which was felt to make IPA a potentially empowering research methodology for LAC in residential education, 'giving a voice' to this group. This could be missed in other methodologies where the emphasis of the research is shifted towards analysis of the language used by participants, such as discourse analysis. IPA was also a favourable methodology as it provides a clear theoretical basis for the research.

The most thorough consideration of an alternative approach was given to Q methodology. This approach involves exploring views of participants by asking them to sort of set of statements pre-prepared by the researcher (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In Q methodology, participants are able to impose their views on the statements by sorting them into a particular order (ibid). This methodology was considered to have a number of advantages for this study. Firstly, it would have allowed participants to express their views through a

card sort activity. Participants may have found it easier to express their views through this kind of activity than an interview.

Another advantage of a card sorting activity was that the activity could be less invasive into the emotional worlds of the participants, potentially providing a safer way of exploring views than a less structured interview situation. This is because card sorting allows individuals to explore thoughts and feelings in a more structured and behavioural way (through physically sorting the cards). This is potentially less invasive than the open-ended questions that participants are likely to be faced with in an interview, which could require participants to organise, reflect on and verbalise emotive experiences. This could be difficult or even upsetting for some LAC engaging in interview research.

Q methodology also would have had the potential advantage of considering the holistic views of participants rather than separating these into themes across participants (Watts & Stenner, 2012). It was felt that this could have helped to understand the holistic and individual experiences of participants, which could be lost in a methodology that incorporates an analysis of themes across cases.

The reason for rejecting Q methodology after this consideration was due to the practical difficulties of obtaining data from sufficient participants for a study of this kind within the time frame of this research. However, reflection on this methodology helped to inform the decision to use a diamond ranking activity in this research (see later discussion). The consideration of Q methodology also influenced the analysis as it was decided that holistic synopses of participants' accounts should be given in addition to the analysis across cases that is perhaps more common in IPA research.

### **3.2.3 How this study differs from a typical IPA approach**

The research differs from a typical IPA research given the use of a diamond ranking activity in the interview. Using this activity arguably limited the degree to which the researcher's own assumptions could be prevented from influencing the interviews, which is an important aspect of IPA research. The use of a diamond ranking activity could suggest that the participants' accounts in this study are a co-construction between the interviewer and

participants rather than emerging from the participants' experiences alone. However, it was felt that the inclusion of this activity was essential for ethical and practical reasons.

The present study also differs from typical IPA research by presenting a separate synopsis of each participant's account in the analysis along with a more typical analysis of themes across the participants. There is a precedent for this in qualitative research by Watts, O'Hara and Trigg (2009), which explores the experiences of patients with Type 1 Diabetes through a by-person analysis, using an approach that was influenced by IPA. Watts et al. (2009) argue that since the experience of diabetes had a holistically different character for each participant, it was more helpful to consider each case separately rather than analyse the themes across cases. The differences between participants' holistic experiences was also recognised in the present research. In the next chapter, a synopsis of each participant's experience is given to preserve this within the analysis.

### **3.2.4 The theoretical underpinnings of IPA**

IPA has its roots in the philosophical and theoretical traditions of phenomenology and hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2009). These perspectives are briefly described in this section.

Phenomenology is the philosophical study of the lived experiences of human beings. There is a particular emphasis in phenomenology on how people make sense of their worlds and what is important to them (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenological enquiry concerns the act of looking at things as they appear to us, setting aside what we already think we know about them (Willig, 2001). A number of different philosophers each contributed their own perspectives and understandings to phenomenological enquiry, although all shared the central concern of trying to understand the nature of a phenomenon through the examination of lived experience (Smith et al., 2009).

Husserl and Heidegger were two important figures and influential thinkers within the field of phenomenology (Langdridge, 2007). Husserl introduced the idea of epoché (also sometimes referred to as 'bracketing'). This is the process through which phenomenologists endeavour to set aside pre-conceived ideas about a given lived experience in order to take a fresh perspective and see the phenomenon in its actual appearance (ibid). According to



Husserl, the process through which we can come to see a phenomenon in its real appearance is the phenomenological reduction of the lived experience. This involves:

- Creating a text through description of the lived experience in as much detail as possible, looking at all aspects of the phenomenon without prioritising any area (horizontalization);
- Tentatively forming hypotheses about hierarchies of meaning in the text (verticalization);
- Checking understanding emerging from our analysis against the original text (verification).

(Langdridge, 2007)

Husserl's thinking was developed by Heidegger. Heidegger argued that lived experience always involves the experiencer in relation to something in the world (Langdridge, 2007). Heidegger argued, therefore, that our understanding of lived experience is always from an individual's perspective. On this basis, Heidegger suggested it is not possible to separate a lived experience from the experiencer through phenomenological reduction (ibid). For Heidegger, this meant it is not possible to reveal the essential nature of a phenomenon (ibid). From this, a key emphasis in Heidegger's phenomenology is on the role of interpretation in understanding lived experience.

For some researchers, this emphasis on interpretation distinguishes between Heidegger and Husserl's approach to phenomenology, given that Husserl felt the process of phenomenological reduction would reveal something essential about the nature of a phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). However, Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006) argue that this view of Husserlian phenomenology is mistaken. The writers suggest that Husserl's more essentialist view reflects a philosophical position that our interpretation of lived experience is itself a part of the lived experience. Following this, it seems that both Heidegger and Husserl emphasised the non-dualistic nature of lived experience, which involves the inseparable elements of experience and experiencer (Larkin et al., 2006). This is an important point in phenomenological research as it suggests that researchers should keep in mind the 'person-in context' (p.106) (Larkin et al., 2006).

The second major theoretical perspective underpinning IPA is hermeneutics. This is a perspective that derives from the study of historical texts and the process of interpretation that scholars engage in to try to understand these texts (Smith et al., 2009). In IPA, hermeneutics relates to the role of interpretation in understanding participants' accounts of lived experiences. There is said to be a double hermeneutic since the analysis hinges both on participants' interpretations of their experiences and researchers' interpretations of participants' accounts. The final analysis, therefore, requires the researcher to give an interpretation of an interpretation (ibid).

From hermeneutics, IPA has inherited the concept of the hermeneutic circle. In this process, the researcher endeavours to understand the whole of a participant's account according to the parts and then the parts of the text according to this understanding of the whole. This continues in a cyclical way until it is felt an understanding has been reached which fits with both the whole and the parts of the account (Smith et al., 2009).

Smith and Osborn (2003) point out that researchers may adopt a hermeneutic that is either empathic or questioning (suspicious). Researchers may also adopt a hermeneutic that balances these positions. These ideas regarding the hermeneutic position in IPA research derive from the philosophical perspectives of Ricoeur (Langdridge, 2007). An empathic hermeneutic suggests a researcher is engaged in interpreting an account in a way that is similar to the literal or intended meanings of the account. In contrast, by adopting a suspicious hermeneutic, the researcher may look for meanings behind the account that are not intended by the participant. This could involve: questioning the participant's ability to express the true meaning of what they have experienced; considering the role of the social context in which the account is given or considering the way the account has been constructed through the linguistic resources available to the participant (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Smith and Osborn (2003) suggest that good IPA research should balance both an empathic and a questioning hermeneutic. The writers emphasise that in IPA research interpretations should emerge from the accounts themselves rather than the theoretical interests of the researcher.

Although the accounts participants give may be descriptive in nature, the interpretative aspect of IPA research suggests that the final analysis should go beyond the surface meaning of participants' accounts in order to 'discover' something of the lived experience of participants (Smith et al., 2009). Larkin et al. (2006) argue for a greater interpretative emphasis in IPA research, suggesting that research using this methodology is often indistinguishable from a thematic analysis, given that it often lacks a deeper analysis and interpretation of the data.

### **3.2.5 The limitations of IPA research**

Willig (2001) argues that one difficulty with IPA is its basis in language. There is an assumption in IPA that spoken accounts reveal something of participants' lived experiences. However, it could be argued that this overlooks the fact that these accounts are constructed using language and are subject to the linguistic constructions available to the individual giving the account. Willig notes that accounts given by participants in phenomenological research could be seen as having been constructed through their linguistic resources rather than having emerged from their lived experience. This has some resonance with the positions of hermeneutic phenomenologists, Gadamer and Ricoeur, who argued that meaning is created both through lived experience and are constructed using language (Langdridge, 2007).

Smith et al. (2009) note that the language used in accounts given in IPA research could be interpreted as actions within a social context, rather than as being a window into the real meanings of the experiences for participants. This is similar to Ricoeur's argument that spoken language (discourse) can lose its meaning as social action when it is transformed into disembodied text on the page (Langdridge, 2007). This could be problematic for IPA research since data from interviews could lose the meaning that these accounts derive from being a social action within a conversation occurring at a particular time and place between the researcher and participant.

The above criticisms are problematic for IPA. However, it could be countered that IPA researchers are able to respond to these concerns by considering the linguistic

constructions underpinning participants' accounts and the social context of the interviews within their interpretations of accounts.

Willig (2001) also notes that IPA could be criticised for describing phenomena rather than explaining them. IPA helps to understand the texture of experiences of participants but it does not consider how these experiences came to be and the conditions which gave rise to these experiences. This does present as a limitation to the present study, which does not attempt to explain how the LAC participating in this study came to be in residential educational placements. It could be argued, therefore, that this limits the extent to which this study is able to fully explore the issues related to the placement of LAC in residential educational provision.

A further criticism of IPA research concerns the suitability of participants' accounts for phenomenological analysis. The use of phenomenology as a philosophical enquiry traditionally involves phenomenologists attempting to gain insight into phenomenon through investigating their own lived experience using an introspective approach (Langdridge, 2007). However, in IPA this introspection is replaced by the accounts given by participants. The 'second-hand' nature of IPA research could be seen as lacking an insight into the embodied nature of lived experience, which was highlighted by existentialists, such as Merleau-Ponty (Langdridge, 2007). For this reason, IPA could be criticised as not being genuinely phenomenological (Willig, 2001).

Furthermore, Willig (2001) points out that it may be difficult for participants to talk about their experiences with sufficient accuracy, detail or understanding for these accounts to be considered suitably authentic material for a phenomenological analysis. This is a limitation to this study as the accounts given consisted of a relatively small amount of detail. This, arguably, made it more challenging to interpret the accounts using an IPA approach.

### **3.3 The trustworthiness of the findings**

The standards of qualitative research are not typically considered according to the same criteria as quantitative research (i.e. reliability and validity), since the subjective

perspectives of the participants and researchers are acknowledged as being necessary aspects of qualitative research (Kvale, 2007). Lincoln and Guba (e.g. 1985) suggested alternative standards by which the quality or 'trustworthiness' of qualitative research can be judged, which have continued to be pertinent to qualitative researchers in more recent years (e.g. Shenton, 2004). The concepts developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), include the transferability, credibility, dependability and 'confirmability' of qualitative research. Each of these concepts will be considered in turn in relation to this study.

In this chapter, the reader is given clear information about the characteristics of participants and the settings they attended. This should help readers to judge how far the findings from this study may be transferable to other situations.

The credibility of this research is supported through adopting a well-established methodology and by explanations in this chapter about how this methodology has been adapted to this study. Lincoln and Guba (2007) suggest that a rich and descriptive analysis is helpful for the reader to see how conclusions have been formed and to allow readers to make judgements regarding the credibility of the analysis. Towards this end, the analysis of data in the next chapter involves a detailed discussion of the findings, which is supported by quotations from the participants' accounts. Effort has been made to make it clear where interpretations have been made and the analysis includes reflexive commentary to explore the influence of the researcher's own subjective position on the findings.

Based on guidelines suggested by Smith et al. (2009), some steps were taken to avoid bias in the interviews. Participants were informed that it was their own accounts that were of interest in the interviews rather than the views of others (such as their family or teachers). Participants were also informed that their views would be confidential. Effort was made to establish rapport and a relaxed atmosphere at the beginning of the interview in order to help create a situation in which participants would feel free to speak openly about their experiences. Steps were also taken to limit bias in the interviews through careful consideration and piloting of the materials used in the interview (see later discussion).

It is hoped that the dependability of this research is evident through a clear account of the decisions made in the research. The ways in which IPA has been adapted for this research are described in this chapter. Although it would not be anticipated that another researcher would reach exactly the same findings if this research were repeated, it should be clear from the analysis in the next chapter how the findings in this study have derived from the methods used.

The 'confirmability' of the data in this study should be seen as the extent to which the findings can be seen as coming from participants rather than the researcher's own views and assumptions (Shenton, 2004). Adhering to good practice in IPA methodology (e.g. use of the 'hermeneutic circle', reflexivity) has supported this aspect of the research. However, given the role of interpretation in this study, it is not necessary that all readers should agree with the findings of this study. It is more important that it is clear where interpretations have been made and how these interpretations have emerged from the participants' accounts.

Morse, Barrett, Mayon, Olson and Spiers (2008) suggest that the quality of qualitative research should not be externally judged by the criteria developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). In contrast, Morse et al. (2008) feel the term 'validity' should be returned to in qualitative research. The writers argue that in qualitative research validity can be understood as concerning whether the research investigates what it claims to investigate, which can only be judged by researchers themselves. According to this view, validity should not be based on external criteria but established in the ongoing research process through the integrity of the researcher. Morse et al. (2008) highlight the importance of the responsiveness and sensitivity of researchers to challenges in the research, the coherence of methodologies adopted and the way in which researchers follow methods specific to their chosen methodologies to enhance the quality of their research. The subsequent sections of this chapter explore the ways in which the challenges and dilemmas in this research have been thought through.

### **3.4 Reflexivity**

The quality of research is enhanced by researchers engaging in reflexivity throughout the research process. Willig (2001) notes the importance of reflexivity in IPA research. Since the researcher has a key role in interpreting and gathering the data, this requires IPA researchers to reflect on how their own assumptions and beliefs affect the research process. Willig (2001) argues that, in IPA, the researcher engages in a process of discovery, where meanings should be seen as emerging from the participants' accounts. It is important, therefore, that researchers are able to acknowledge and be responsive to the influence of their own subjectivity during the analysis (Willig, 2001). Smith et al. (2009) note that there needs to be an ongoing process of reflection during the research. This is because researchers can become aware of their own assumptions and biases during the research process to an extent that may not be possible from the outset.

The terms reflection and reflexivity are closely related. Reflexivity can be defined as the act of reflection by an individual during the unfolding of an event, which allows decisions to be made and actions to be taken in response to this reflection (Finlay, 2002). In this way, reflexivity in research requires researchers to reflect on the way their assumptions, values, prior experience, hopes for the research and relationship with participants influences the research process. This reflection can then be used to inform decisions made throughout the research process (Finlay, 2002).

There were three ways in which researcher reflexivity was incorporated into this research. Firstly, reflection was carried out prior to carrying out the interviews to explore the researcher's own assumptions about the topic. This involved making notes about: expected outcomes of the research; outcomes that were hoped for and also concerns about the research process at the time. From this reflection, it was then possible to attempt to set aside these prior beliefs and assumptions and carry out the interviews with a more open mind.

Secondly, notes were made after the interviews using a research diary to reflect on the interviews and the researcher's initial responses to them. Notes were made on: things that

were felt to have gone well and difficulties encountered; initial interpretations and the researcher's feelings about the interview and the participant. It was then possible to reflect on these observations to gain insight into how the researcher's subjective position was influencing initial interpretations and the interview process.

Finally, reflexive approaches was also adopted during the analysis of the interviews. This involved reflection on the researcher's own responses during the analysis of the transcripts to gain further insight into the role of the researcher in shaping the findings of the research. A research diary was used to support this process.

Reflexive commentary boxes are used later in this thesis to highlight these thought processes. For the sake of clarity, the voice used for writing these sections is in the first-person.

### **3.5 The methods used to gather data**

Smith et al. (2009) note that the most common way for data to be collected in IPA research is to carry out individual interviews. This was the method used in this research. The use of interviews with participants is well suited to this methodology since they should give the opportunity for the researcher to explore the lived experiences of participants, combining curiosity and gentle probing to try and gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience under investigation (ibid).

Other ways of gathering data were also considered, including asking participants to complete diary entries or conducting a focus group. For this research, however, it was felt that participants would perhaps not engage in a diary writing activity or would not engage with this in a way that would provide sufficiently rich material for an IPA analysis. A focus group might also have been problematic as it was felt that the potential pressures and constraints created by a group discussion could have made it more difficult to gain an insight into the lived worlds of participants.



In IPA research, interviews tend to be semi-structured, particularly where researchers are adopting this method for the first time (Smith et al., 2009). A semi-structured interview consists of a plan of open-ended questions that should be used as a rough guide to what is talked about in the interview. A flexible approach was used in the interviews in this research, with the intention that follow-up questions should be based on the answers given by participants rather than a pre-arranged schedule. The aim of this was to encourage exploration of the participants' experiences from their own point of view, rather than a pre-arranged agenda (ibid). However, Smith et al. (2009) note that some structure can be useful in the interview to help guide the conversation back towards the focus of discussion and to support the researcher in asking questions that will explore the experience of participants on a deeper level.

It was anticipated that participants could have difficulty discussing their experiences in detail in the interviews due to difficulties they might have with the organisation and communication of their thoughts on potentially emotive personal experiences. For this reason, it was important to plan a structured sequence of questions that would support participants in talking about their experiences whilst keeping the questions sufficiently open-ended so as not to guide the interview along the lines of the researcher's own assumptions. Guidelines suggested by Smith et al. (2009) were referred to for the planning of the semi-structured interviews. From this, it was decided that the interview would:

- Begin with more straight-forward questions that are relatively easy for participants to answer;
- Move from questions that are more general (descriptive) to more specific (probing);
- Have prompts prepared in case participants did not understand the question or had difficulty knowing how to answer it;
- Avoid leading and biasing questions by keeping the questions open and non-directive;
- Include questions that would give participants the opportunity to talk about things that would enable discussion around the topic, as oppose to asking participants the research question itself (which would have been too broad and difficult to answer);

- Involve asking a fairly small number of questions, to enable participants to talk in as much depth as possible about aspects of their experiences that were important to them.

Appendix B.1 gives the interview schedule used in this research. The way in which this was developed through piloting is described later in this chapter.

### **3.5.1 The use of a diamond ranking activity**

To support participants in expressing their views, a diamond ranking activity was used at the start of the interview. Diamond ranking activities require people to express their views through sorting a small number of statements (usually nine statements are used). This has traditionally been used as a thinking skills activity (Rocket & Percival, 2002) although it has also been used as a research tool to support the elicitation of views with children and young people (e.g. Clark, 2012; Hopkins, 2010), including LAC (Thomas & O’Kane, 1998). The strength of using a diamond ranking activity is that when participants rank statements it requires them to make explicit their own view of the relative importance of each statement. This makes the participant’s view of the phenomenon available for scrutiny and comparison by the researcher (Clark, 2012).

Clark (2012) suggests that diamond ranking is an approach that promotes inclusivity since sorting statements can enable participants to express their viewpoint more easily. It is argued that the use of this approach provides a helpful means of gaining views and facilitating discussion. It has also been found to be an approach that can be used effectively alongside other methods of gathering data, such as interviews, (Bucknall, 2007).

The diamond ranking activity was used in this study as an additional source of data, alongside the data from the interview questions. It was also used to stimulate discussion within the interviews, with around half of the conversation in the interviews coming from the diamond ranking activity and half from the interview questions. The discussion generated from the diamond ranking activity was analysed together with the rest of the interview according to IPA guidelines (see later section).

There were some reservations about using a diamond ranking activity, given that this could possibly constrain the responses given by participants. However, the benefits from using the activity were felt to outweigh these concerns (see section on ethical considerations). From the participants' accounts, it is possible to see how the use of this activity allowed participants to talk about their experiences in ways that were not predicted by the statements. For example, the statement 'I have close friends' allowed participants to discuss why they placed this statement where they did and what this meant to them. One participant reflected that he does not have close friends in the setting but is not concerned with this as he is more focused on his work.

Furthermore, it is possible to identify a number of aspects of the participants' accounts that did not relate to any of the statements in the diamond ranking activity. For example, participants talked about the importance of receiving an education and their sense of the normality of their experiences. These experiences were not anticipated by any of the statements.

### **3.5.2 Generating statements for the diamond ranking activity**

In some previous studies using a diamond ranking activity, statements for use in the activity have been generated from prior interviews with participants (Thomas & O'Kane; Hopkins, 2010). However, this was not possible in this research due to time constraints. Therefore, statements were generated based on things LAC have said about their educational experiences that were identified in the literature review.

The statements for the activity were generated following the same process used in Q methodology (Watts & Stenner, 2012) since this approach was originally considered as a potential methodology for this research. Following the literature review, a list was made of all the things LAC have said about educational placements in the existing research, which were then sorted into themes (e.g. 'learning', 'friendships' and 'pastoral support'). Statements were added to these themes that were felt to be things LAC could say about out of authority residential educational placements. Time was taken to review these statements, considering how they could be grouped thematically and additional statements were added that were felt to be missing. This process involved reviewing the statements

with another Trainee EP and in supervision with a qualified EP. Care was taken to avoid duplication and to present statements in simple language. In line with Q methodology research, it was intended that the statements should cover the full scope of things LAC could potentially say about placements whilst avoiding overlap between statements (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

The above process generated a list of 48 statements (see appendix C.2), which would have been suitable for Q methodology research. However, this was too many statements to use in a diamond ranking activity. Therefore, statements were grouped together so that a number of statements could be encompassed by a single statement. For example, the statements 'I would like to go to a different kind of school', 'I would rather go to school somewhere else', 'I hate going to this school' and 'I fit in here' were grouped together as 'I like being here' for the diamond ranking activity.

Although some of the meanings from the original statements were lost from this reduction, it was felt that the discussion following the diamond ranking activity would allow participants to convey more subtle meanings about their experiences. A few statements were simply taken out from the full list because it was felt that these were too specific and could bias the discussion based on the diamond ranking activity. For example, the statement 'I feel I am supported by too many professionals' was removed for this reason.

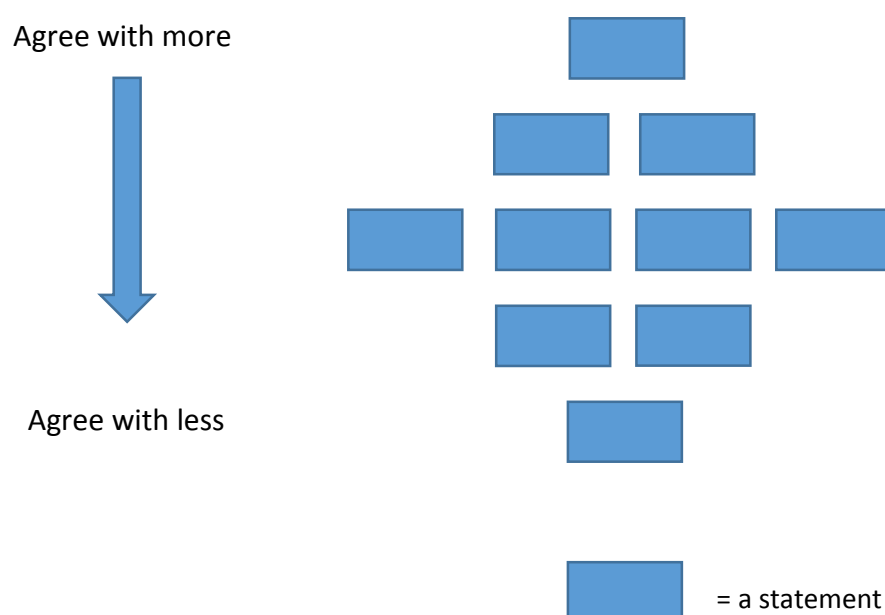
The diamond ranking activity was piloted before use in the final study (see section on piloting). The statements used in the diamond ranking activity in this study are presented in Appendix C.1

### **3.5.3 How the diamond ranking activity was used**

Diamond ranking requires participants to rank statements presented on cards in a diamond formation according to their level of agreement with them (typically nine statements are used, although ten were used in this study). In this study participants created five 'levels' of statements in a diamond formation (the number of statements on each level was 1-2-4-2-1 respectively).

Participants place the statement they agree with the most at the top. The more a participant agrees with a statement, the higher this statement needs to be placed in the diamond. The statement at the bottom is the one which the participant agrees with the least.

**Figure 1: The arrangement of statements needed to complete the diamond ranking activity**



This activity was then used as a reference point for discussion in the interview. For example, discussion could be elicited by asking ‘Why did you put this statement at the top?’ In the interview schedule, it was decided that it would be simplest to carry out the diamond ranking activity at the start so that it could be used as a point of reference to promote discussion in the interview.

### 3.5.4 Piloting

The interview schedule and diamond ranking activity were piloted with two participants of secondary school age who attended a specialist behaviour provision within the local authority. The main aim of the pilot was to explore the use of the diamond ranking activity and the research questions in order to evaluate their suitability and make any adjustments

needed. It was important to evaluate whether these approaches would support participants in expressing their views, without overly constraining the views of the participants.

There were a number of findings from the pilot that supported developments in the interview schedule for the final research. Firstly, it was found that the participants readily engaged in the diamond ranking activity and this was felt to create a relaxed atmosphere at the start of the interview. Participants in the pilot were able to express different views on their experiences according to how they sorted the statements. For example, the participants in the pilot placed the statement 'I enjoy being here' at different positions in the diamond, which reflected different views on the placement as a whole. It was found that the diamond ranking activity was a useful starting point for discussion in the interview, supporting participants to discuss: their overall feelings about the placement; significant relationships with others in the setting and difficulties encountered in the placement. From the piloting of the diamond ranking activity, the statements appeared to give good coverage of the range of topics that could be discussed in the interview so these were left unchanged.

The pilot helped to shape the interview questions for the final research. A number of changes were made in the final research from the questions used in the pilot study (see appendix B.2 for the questions used in the pilot interview). The first question 'What is a normal day like here?' was found to be a useful starting point for discussion so this was retained. However, some questions used in the pilot were found to be difficult to answer and did not stimulate discussion. E.g. 'What is it like coming here compared to where you were before?' and 'Do you think this is the best place for you to come to school right now?' This, arguably, was because these questions were too specific and may have required relatively complex thought processes to answer. For this reason, these questions were removed from the interview schedule and simpler, more open questions were brought forward in the interview, such as 'What do you like about coming here?' and 'What has helped whilst you have been here?'

Reflection on the pilot interview highlighted that the reasons for the participants' move to the placement had not been discussed in the interviews. As this was felt to be relevant to the participants' holistic experiences of their placements, a question was added to reflect

this to the interview schedule. Following the pilot, it was also considered that it would have been useful to have explored with participants if they would like to change anything about their placement so a question was added to include this in the interview schedule.

#### **Reflexive Commentary**

My own experience of the pilot highlighted some of the assumptions that I was bringing to the research process. I was worried that the participants would be unwilling to take part or would be uncommunicative in the interview. The openness of the participants to speak about their experiences was experienced with a sense of relief. This highlighted that I may have been bringing a pressure for participants to speak in the interview, which could have created an unhelpful tension in the interviews. Recognising this helped me to be more relaxed in the interviews that followed.

### **3.6 Ethical considerations**

Given the vulnerability of participants in this research, it was important to keep the risk of harm from the research process to an absolute minimum, eliminating risks as far as possible. Towards this end, the participants who were approached to take part in the research were all felt to be in secure placements at the time. Social workers and settings were approached to discuss the possibility of carrying out the research to ensure that there were no current concerns that would make the interview process at all difficult for participants. Following this, consent forms and information sheets were sent to participants, Social Workers and parents who still retained parental responsibility (See appendices H & I).

At the start of the interviews, participants were reminded that their engagement was voluntary and they were free to withdraw at any time. The purpose of the interview was also explained again so that it was clear that the views of participants would not be acted upon and were being gathered for research purposes alone. Participants were given the option of having a familiar adult with them in the interview (this was chosen by one participant). Arrangements were also made with the settings for a familiar adult to be

available following the interview in case any issues emerged that the participants wished to discuss.

As discussed earlier, a diamond ranking activity was used at the start of the interview as this was felt to be a less invasive way of eliciting the views of participants who may have had difficult experiences in their placements. During the interviews it was important to be responsive to the emotional state of participants and to avoid probing into any areas of experience that could cause participants any sort of distress.

There was no intention to provide benefits directly for the participants as a result of the research process, other than the opportunity to contribute their views to the research project. This was communicated to participants through information sheets and at the time of the interview. It was explained to participants that the findings of the research would be shared with professionals, such as EPs and Social Workers and would be used to support understanding of the experiences of LAC in residential educational placements amongst professionals.

Feedback forms were sent to participants, settings and social workers outlining the main findings of the research (see appendices J & K). Unfortunately, it was not possible to meet with participants directly due to time constraints so familiar adults were asked to discuss the findings with each of the participants. Details were provided so that participants and setting staff could discuss the findings with the researcher if this was desirable.

In line with the ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2009), all data held about the participants was kept strictly confidential. No details of the participants were shared with any third parties. All information held about the participants (such as consent forms) were placed securely and was only accessible to the researcher. Any information containing details of the participants was destroyed once this was no longer needed.



### **3.7 How the data was analysed**

#### **3.7.1 Choosing between a by-person analysis and an analysis across cases**

Considering the transcripts raised a question of whether to present findings as a by-person analysis or as an analysis across cases. This consideration was influenced by Watts et al.'s (2009) argument that by-person qualitative analysis can capture the holistic and distinctive experiences of individual participants more fully.

It is more typical for IPA research to carry out an analysis of themes that emerge across the cases. However, Smith et al. (2009) note that IPA analysis can also be carried out by analysing accounts separately, which can be described as a by-person analysis. There was some sense in using a by-person analysis in this research to preserve an individual and holistic sense of each participant's experience. These aspects could have been lost in an analysis across cases. This argument was influenced by previous consideration of Q methodology, an approach in which viewpoints are considered as a whole rather than being separated into discrete themes.

In order to analysis accounts across cases in IPA research, there needs to be sufficient homogeneity across the experiences of participants for this to be a meaningful analysis (Smith et al., 2009). It was important to feel that this was the case in order to present an analysis across cases in the present study. With sufficient homogeneity, an analysis across cases using IPA should result in common themes across cases that support understanding of the individual accounts more deeply (Smith et al., 2009).

In the present study, it was felt that the analysis across cases was successful in achieving this aim, suggesting there was sufficient homogeneity across the participants' experiences for an analysis of this kind. For example, the theme of 'a sense of normality and belonging' in the settings could be seen in some form in all the accounts and was felt to give some insight into the experiences of all the participants. This theme also highlighted a contrast between the strong sense of belonging emerging in the accounts of three of the participants and one participant's overall feelings of being out of place in the setting.

Despite the insights offered by an analysis across cases, there was found to be a lot of variety between the participants' accounts, which presented a challenge for an analysis across cases. For example, all the participants talked about feelings of being away from home, but the significance of this was different for each participant and seemed to relate differently to each participant's experience of the placement as a whole. The way these subtle differences related to the holistic experiences of participants could not be captured easily through the analysis across cases.

In light of the above reservation about an analysis across cases, it was decided that the analysis should also present a synopsis of the participants' individual, holistic experiences. Individual synopses of each participant's account were written following the analysis and these are presented in the findings of this research (see next chapter).

### **3.7.2 The analysis used in this study**

This section presents an overview of the analysis. The data was analysed following the steps outlined for IPA research by Smith et al. (2009). A more detailed description of each stage of the analysis, including the dilemmas that were encountered, is described in the next chapter.

Data was transcribed from Dictaphone recordings of the interviews. Each interview was first analysed individually. In the first stage of the analysis, the transcripts were read whilst listening to the Dictaphone recordings to get a feel for what the words on the page sounded like in the interview and as an additional check of the accuracy of the transcription. During the first stage of analysis, each transcript was analysed individually to identify the superordinate and subordinate themes for each account. The data from the diamond ranking activity was used as an additional reference point to support the development of these themes. Following this, a comparison was made to identify similarities and differences in the themes across the accounts. This supported the development of the main and subordinate themes that were emerging at this stage of the research. The final themes continued to be developed whilst writing up the findings from the analysis.

The individual synopses were based on the participants' individual accounts, but were written following the analysis across all four accounts. This supported a deeper understanding of each participant's account. The synopses were based on the way the main themes in the study emerged in each participant's account and the researcher's understanding of how these themes seemed to fit together across the participant's experience as a whole.

### **3.8 Specific procedures carried out in this study**

#### **3.8.1 Specific tools used to gather data**

The interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed for analysis. Semi-structured interviews were carried out. An interview script and schedule were prepared in advance (see appendices A and B.1). A diamond ranking activity was also used (see appendix C.1 for the cards used in this activity).

#### **3.8.2 Participants**

All participants were LAC who were in the care of a local authority of a large metropolitan city in the United Kingdom. The participants all attended residential educational placements outside of their home local authority. These settings were at a distance of between approximately 60 miles and 73 miles of the local authority. The length of time the participants had been in these placements ranged from 12 months to 26 months. Three of the participants were on 52 week placements whilst one participant returned to his home local authority for one week of the year. All of the settings were residential educational provisions that cater for pupils with a range of special educational needs including emotional, behavioural and communication difficulties.

Four participants took part in this study, all of whom were males. With regards to ethnicity, three of the participants were white and one participant was of mixed ethnic heritage. All of the participants were of secondary school age and the age range of participants was from 14 to 15 years old.

Participants were considered for this study with the support of a Senior EP in the local authority who was familiar with the background of potential participants. It was taken into consideration that participants would need to have a level of communication skills that would enable them to express their views verbally in an interview. It was decided that potential participants whose current placements were felt to be unstable would not be approached for ethical reasons.

**Table 1: Characteristics of the participants in this study**

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Year Group	Ethnicity	Length of time in placement	Type of setting
Callum	14yr 7m	9	White British	1yr 1m	Independent special school  52 week and 39 week residential placements  Ages 10-17
Craig	15yr 4m	9	White British	12m	Independent special school  52 and 39 week residential placements  Ages 10-18
Sam	15yr 5m	10	Mixed Black Caribbean British	2yr 7m	Independent special school  38 week residential placements  Ages 10-19
Andrew	14yr 9m	9	White British	2yr 1m	Independent special school  52 week residential placements  Ages 11-18

### **3.8.3 Procedure**

Interviews were carried out in a comfortable space for participants. All participants were interviewed individually and were given the option of being accompanied by a familiar adult.

The script used in the interviews explained to participants that the interview was for research purposes rather than to help them with any issues regarding their own placements. It was also noted to participants that all information given would be confidential and that they had the right to withdraw from the interview process at any point. Arrangements were made so that participants could speak to a familiar member of staff following the interview in case the interview itself had raised difficult feelings for them. Each participant was interviewed once with interviews lasting around 20-25 minutes. The interviews began with the diamond ranking activity. Following this, the interview continued using questions from the interview schedule (see appendices A & B.1).

### **3.9 Summary**

This chapter has discussed the methodology of this research, outlining how IPA has been adapted to meet the needs of this study. It has been discussed that this research is not intended to establish a generalizable principle, but rather to support understanding and reflection on the experiences of LAC in out of authority residential educational placements. Some consideration has also been given to the theoretical basis of IPA and the kind of knowledge created by this research. There has also been a discussion of the ethical considerations required by this research, the efforts that have been made to support the 'trustworthiness' of the research and the role of reflexivity in the research process. This chapter finished by outlining the specific methods carried out in this study.

## **4. Analysis and Findings**

The first part of this chapter outlines each stage of the analysis, which followed an IPA approach. This is followed by a discussion of the main themes that emerged during the analysis, with supporting quotes from the accounts. The final section of this chapter presents a synopsis of each participant's account to give a holistic and individual sense of their experience. First names are used when referring to the participants in this chapter and pseudonyms are used in all cases for the sake of confidentiality.

### **4.1 A description of each stage of the analysis**

This section presents a discussion of each stages of the analysis, which reveals the stages through which the main themes emerged in this study. As described in the previous chapter, the data was analysed using guidelines for IPA, which are outlined by Smith et al. (2009). This section includes a description of the analysis including:

- The individual analysis of each participant's account;
- A comparison of themes across cases;
- The emergence of main themes across the cases;
- The refinement of themes during the writing up of the analysis.

#### **4.1.1 The individual analysis of each account**

Each interview was analysed according to IPA guidelines. See appendices D.1, D.2 and E.1, which illustrate the progression of the analysis of an example transcript from notes made alongside the raw data, to a set of emergent themes and then to a list of superordinate and subordinate themes for this account.

For each transcript, initial exploratory comments were made in the right hand margin of the page. The transcripts were then re-read a few times to produce detailed exploratory comments, which included descriptive comments, emerging concepts and notes on the language used. Words and phrases that seemed to be of key importance were highlighted in the transcripts. These exploratory comments were then used to help create a set of emergent themes that were noted in the left hand margin of the transcripts as the themes emerged.

At this stage, the diamond ranking activity provided a useful reference point as it allowed the researcher to refer back to this data and cross-reference it with the themes that were emerging, supporting interpretation of the accounts. This was helpful at times to clarify understanding and deepen insight into the text. For example, the data from Callum's diamond ranking activity helped to illustrate Callum's overall feelings about his placement. From the analysis of the interview data alone, it emerged that Callum expressed a mixture of feelings about his placement. However, the diamond ranking activity highlighted the relative importance Callum placed on the statements 'I like being here' and 'I am happy'. Taken together, the interview and diamond ranking data suggested that Callum had an overall positive sense of the experience, but at the same time he was aware of some difficult feelings about the placement as well (see the diamond ranking data for each participant below).

Following the analysis of each transcript, the emergent themes were then typed onto separate pieces of paper and the data was analysed again by grouping themes together so that the emergent themes were clustered together under superordinate themes. Some emergent themes did not fit under superordinate themes at this stage and were kept separate to be reconsidered when looking at themes across cases.

The analysis of each transcript as a list of super-ordinate and emergent themes was then presented in a table for each transcript with key words and quotes to support each theme (see appendices E.1 to E.4). At this stage, the original transcripts were reconsidered to see how well the analysis was appearing to 'fit' with the raw data. Changes to the structure of themes and sub-themes were then made accordingly.

This information is summarised below in Table 2 to show the super-ordinate themes that emerged across all four accounts at this stage of the analysis.

**Table 2: Super-ordinate themes for each participant after the analysis of each transcript**

	<b>Callum</b>	<b>Craig</b>	<b>Sam</b>	<b>Andrew</b>
Superordinate themes emerging in each account	Tensions between overall positive changes in life situation and some difficult feelings remaining	Positive changes from the move	Emotionally self-contained and self-empowered	Wanting to be back in home town with family and friends
	Being in a supportive, caring and inclusive environment	Generally feeling happy with things as they are	Normal experience of school life	Feeling that personal freedoms have been limited in this setting
	Established routines that include enjoyable and rewarding activities	Supported by others and by structures in the setting	Powerlessness in move	Being a rule-breaker/ rogue
	Generally fitting in, getting on with others and school life	Challenges with the move	Wanting to be home	Having a supportive peer group
	Facing a challenging move but accepting changes	Accepting of not having a close friendship group	Problems in the past	Anger about the way the move happened
		Engaging in some enjoyable activities		Finding some advantages to the new setting



**Figure 2: The diamond ranking data for each participant**

**Interview 1: Callum**

I feel happy  
I like being here I get the help I need  
I have close friends I am treated fairly People listen to my views I feel safe and secure  
I do things I enjoy I get on well with others  
I enjoy lessons

**Interview 2: Craig**

I feel safe and secure  
I feel happy I get the help I need  
People listen to my views I enjoy lessons I am treated fairly I like being here  
I do things I enjoy I get on well with others  
I have close friends

**Interview 3: Sam**

I feel safe and secure  
I get on well with others I have close friends  
I do things I enjoy I get the help I need I enjoy lessons People listen to my views  
I am treated fairly I feel happy  
I enjoy lessons

**Interview 4: Andrew**

I have close friends  
I do things I enjoy I get on well with others  
I enjoy lessons I am treated fairly I get the help I need People listen to my views  
I feel happy I feel safe and secure  
I like being here

#### **4.2.2 Comparing themes across cases**

Following the individual analyses, a comparison was made between the themes emerging in the accounts across cases, which highlighted similarities and divergences between the accounts. This analysis began by comparing the superordinate themes across the interviews and seeing where the same or similar themes had emerged across different interviews. This comparison supported the emergence of the main themes in the study. Where superordinate themes did not cross-over exactly, emergent themes were considered across the interviews to find more commonalities. From this, themes were identified that were occurring in some or all of the transcripts. Although this stage began with a comparison of the superordinate themes across the accounts, consideration was also given to similar and contrasting emergent themes across the accounts. For example, although the experience of a 'normal school life' was a superordinate theme from Sam's account, the same theme did not emerge as a superordinate theme in the other accounts. However, there were clearly similarities between this theme and subordinate themes in Callum and Craig's accounts. As a result, the theme of normality and belonging began to take shape as one of the potential themes in this study.

This process created a list of themes emerging across the cases, which are outlined in the table below. Some themes were developed at this stage through comparing similar themes from different accounts and grouping them together under a new heading that better reflected the experience of a number of participants. For example, 'wanting to be in my home town' and 'mixed feelings about being away from home' were grouped together under a new theme of 'a feeling of being away from home'. It can be seen in table 3 how some of the themes in the final analysis began to emerge through the similarities that were noted at this stage across participants. For example, the presence of the emerging theme of participants having feelings about being away from home, helped to form one of the main themes in this study of the experience of being away from home and from emotional intimacy.

**Table 3: Comparison of themes across accounts**

Themes	Is the theme present in the participant's account?			
	<b>Callum</b>	<b>Craig</b>	<b>Sam</b>	<b>Andrew</b>
A feeling of 'being away from home'	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Normal school routines and experiences	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Fitting in and adapting to a new situation	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Access to enjoyable activities	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Negative feelings about previous setting	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
The experience of emotional support	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Use of coping strategies	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Not attending in previous setting	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Making educational progress/ importance of education	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Lack of power or influence over the move	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
A feeling of not needing support	No	No	Yes	No
Missing friends and family	No	No	No	Yes
Loss of freedom	No	No	No	Yes
Having mixed feelings	Yes	Yes	No	No
Feeling that the move was for the best	Yes	Yes	No	No
Wanting to be back in home town	No	No	Yes	Yes
Difficulties in previous care situation	No	Yes	No	No
Difficulties in previous school situation	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

At this stage, contrasts were noted down between the accounts given by the four participants. Reference to the diamond ranking activity also supported the analysis across cases. For example, there were obvious contrasts between the diamond ranking data for

Craig and Andrew, such as their feelings of security and feelings of closeness to friends in their placements.

The contrasts noted at this time included:

- Feelings that the move to an out of authority placement was for the best and wishing to return to their home town;
- Accepting changes and anger about changes;
- Receiving emotional support from adults and seeing adults as authoritarian figures;
- A feeling of belonging and a feeling of being away from home;
- Valuing emotional support and being emotionally self-reliant;
- Feelings of normality and feelings of strangeness;
- Being occupied by routines and activities and being self-occupied;
- Not having contact with friends and family and having opportunity for contact with friends and family.

This exploration of themes across cases and the contrasts between accounts helped to shape the final themes in the study. For example, the experience of normality and belonging became stronger as a theme by considering the contrast between Andrew's experience of the placement being abnormal for him and the experiences of a normal school life described by the other participants.

It was clear at this stage that the main themes in the study needed to capture the contrasts in the experiences between participants. For example, 'feelings about home' was a common theme emerging in all accounts, however there were clear differences in how this theme presented in each participant's account.

#### **4.2.3 Establishing themes across the cases**

At this stage, the analysis involved grouping together themes that had emerged in the comparison across cases into clusters of similar themes. In this way, it was possible to explore different ways of grouping themes together to form themes across the accounts. This involved exploring various possibilities, from which a 'best fit' emerged, in which the

themes were felt to reflect the accounts as fully as possible. As themes were beginning to take shape, quotations were identified in the text to support each theme, which helped to further refine the themes. This was an iterative process that involved moving between the raw data and the analysis to make necessary adjustments until it was felt that the analysis had reached a point where there was a satisfactory reflection of the data as a whole within the themes identified.

Comparing different ways of capturing the experiences of all the participants in this way resulted in a number of deliberations during the analysis. One early theme that emerged related to the relationships experienced by participants in the placements. However, the theme of relationships was felt to be too broad. It did not seem to give a real insight into the experiences of the participants since it did not give any understanding of the nature of the relationships experienced by participants. Given the variety of ways that the participants experienced relationships, it was difficult to capture this as a theme across the accounts. After further reflection, it was felt that the contrast between the theme of close supportive relationships of three of the participants and of the independence of one of the participants could form the basis of a theme that captured something of the experience of all four participants. This, therefore, led to the emergence of the theme of experiencing emotional support or of independence.

One main theme that took some time to emerge related to the participants' experience of structure and boundaries. This emerged from earlier possible themes, including 'life changes from the placement' and 'difficulties in the past'. However, these possibilities were felt to be too descriptive and did not appear to give sufficient insight into the experiences of the participants. Another possible theme here was of 'emotional containment'. However, this was felt to be less reflective of the experiences across all four participants: Andrew found the experience of structure and boundaries confining rather than containing. On further reflection, it was felt that the participants had all experienced greater structure and boundaries as a result of the placements. As a result, the experience of structure and boundaries emerged as a further theme in the study.

Another deliberation was around whether to include the theme of experiencing educational engagement as a main theme. This experience was ultimately felt to be related to the stability participants experienced as a result of the structure and boundaries in their placements. Furthermore, it was not present in all four participants' accounts. Therefore, the experience of educational success was felt to be better represented as a subordinate theme, related to the main theme of experiencing structure and boundaries. However, it is important to stress that the experience of educational engagement is a strong aspect of this theme.

From this analysis, a tentative list of main themes were identified for the study. Appendix G shows how each of these superordinate themes grouped clusters of subordinate themes together, with supporting quotations.

At this stage, five main themes emerged from the analysis. These were:

- Feelings of being away from home and where participants felt they were meant to be;
- A lack of influence over the change in placement;
- Making adjustments to a new life situation;
- Emotional support and independence;
- The presence of structure and boundaries.

Some themes that emerged in the comparison of the themes across accounts were not included in the analysis at this stage, such as 'the presence of enjoyable activities' and 'the use of coping strategies'. This was because when the original accounts were once again referred to, these themes were not felt to be particularly strong in comparison to other themes that emerged. Therefore, their inclusion did not seem appropriate in the final analysis.

#### **4.2.4 Writing up the analysis**

The themes identified prior to writing up the research were similar but not identical to the final themes that emerged from this study. This was because the themes continued to be

refined through the process of writing up the analysis. Whilst writing up the analysis, it was felt that the theme of 'making adjustments to a new life situation' leant too heavily on the researcher's own interpretation of the accounts. It was felt that the assumptions of the researcher were being imposed on the account rather than meaning emerging from the account (see reflexive commentary). For this reason, the original quotations that had been lifted from the accounts to support this theme were reconsidered. From this, a better reflection of the accounts appeared to be that participants were describing their experience of a sense of normality in their placement, which is why the theme in the final analysis was changed to reflect this.

#### **Reflexive Commentary**

After the interviews, I noted feeling impressed by how well the participants had adapted to the transition to residential educational placements and appeared to be resilient to the challenges faced in their lives. Initially, I also interpreted some of the accounts in this way: as participants overcoming a significant challenge in order to be successful in their placements. This led to the early theme of 'adjusting to life changes'. However, this did not feel like a sufficiently accurate interpretation of the accounts when I began to write up the analysis. By reflecting on my own feelings about the interviews, I noticed that this interpretation reflected an underlying assumption about the presence of hardship in the lives of participants and difficulties that they would have needed to overcome as a result of the move to an out of authority placement. At this stage, by recognising how my own assumptions were influencing the analysis, I was able to take a fresh perspective on the accounts. What emerged more clearly was a sense of normality and belonging felt by participants (or the opposite of this). This had a different character to a theme of adapting to life changes and appeared to capture the experiences described by the participants more accurately.

The main themes continued to evolve during the writing up of the analysis. Rather than present these as themes and sub-themes, it was decided that it would be simpler to present these as five main themes in the study and describe the way each theme presented in

different ways across the accounts for each participant. One difficulty encountered was deciding where to include in the final analysis the participants' experiences of finding more emotional space in their placements due to the physical environment of the settings. This idea was not quite strong enough to be a theme in its own right but was felt to give an interesting insight into the experiences of some of the participants. This aspect of their experiences seemed to relate to both the experience of structure and boundaries and to the experience of emotional support. Although it was not a perfect 'fit', it was felt that this aspect of these participants' experiences related best to their experiences of emotional support since it highlighted an emotionally supportive aspect of their experience of their placements as a whole. For this reason, the experience of physical space was included in the theme of the participants' experience of emotional support or of independence.

#### **4.2.5 The Main Themes**

Although there was considerable variability between participants, some consistent themes emerged from the data. The final main themes that emerged were the experience of:

- Being in a place away from home and from emotional intimacy;
- A lack of influence on the change in placement;
- Supportive relationships or of independence and self-reliance;
- The presence of structure and boundaries;
- 'Normality' and belonging.

Table 4 summarises these themes and describes the way each theme presented in the accounts of each participant. In the next part of this chapter, these themes are explored in more detail with quotations from the accounts.

To illustrate how the final themes relate to the initial analysis of each participant's account, table 5 shows how the superordinate themes from each participant's original account maps on to the final themes in the analysis. The first column in each row describes the main theme from the study and subsequent columns highlight how the superordinate themes in each participant's account relate to this theme.



**Table 4: The main themes and how they presented in each account**

Main Themes	Callum	Craig	Sam	Andrew
The experience of being in a place away from home and from emotional intimacy.	Had mixed feelings about being away from home and close relationships.	Found a greater sense of belonging in the placement but lacked close friendships.	Accepted the move but wanted to be back in his home town.	Felt isolated and angry at being away from home and emotional ties.
The experience of a lack of influence at the time of the move.	Involved in discussions but no feeling of influence.	Asked for views but felt it was tokenistic.	Did not want to move but had no power to challenge this.	Not included in discussions or warned about move. Responded angrily to this.
The experience of supportive relationships or of independence.	Valued the emotional support of a range of adults in the setting.	Experienced support in setting to help manage feelings.	Did not feel the need for emotional support-was self-reliant.	Experienced adults as authoritarian but experienced support from peers.
The presence of structure and boundaries.	Received an education that he was not previously due to non-attendance and behaviour in previous setting	Concentrated on his education and liked to keep himself busy.	Theme not clearly present in account, although Sam described not really attending school in the past.	Received an education that he was not previously due to non-attendance. Found the presence of boundaries in the setting hard to adapt to.
The experience of 'normality' and belonging.	Adapted easily to the placement and fit in easily.	Found it easy to fit in. Felt like it was a normal school.	Felt the experience was just like being at a normal boarding school.	Found that being in a structured school environment was not normal for him and this made it difficult.

**Table 5: The main themes in the study and how they map onto the superordinate themes in each participant's account**

Main theme	How the superordinate themes from each account map on to this theme			
	Callum	Craig	Sam	Andrew
The experience of being in a place away from home and from emotional intimacy.	Tensions between overall positive changes in life situation and some difficult feelings remaining	Accepting of not having a close friendship group	Wanting to be home	Wanting to be back in home town with family and friends
The experience of a lack of influence at the time of the move.	Facing a challenging move but accepting changes	Challenges with the move	Powerlessness in move	Anger about the way the move happened
The experience of supportive relationships or of independence.	Being in a supportive, caring and inclusive environment	Positive changes from the move  Supported by others and by structures in the setting	Emotionally self-contained and self-empowered	Having a supportive peer group
The presence of structure and boundaries	Established routines that include enjoyable and rewarding activities	Engaging in some enjoyable activities	Problems in the past	Finding some advantages to the new setting  Being a rule-breaker/ rogue
The experience of 'normality' and belonging.	Generally fitting in, getting on with others and school life	Generally feeling happy with things as they are	Normal experience of school life	Feeling that personal freedoms have been limited in this setting

### 4.3 Discussion of themes across participants

#### 4.3.1 A distance from home and from emotional intimacy

A theme emerging from all four interviews was found to be feelings about home. For three of the participants, it seems as though home was felt to be their previous home areas rather than their current settings. The accounts suggested that there remains an emotional pull from home on the lives of participants and difficult feelings resulting from being away from home. There was a sense of fitting in with others but not experiencing the closeness of

special friendships in their placements. Some participants missed more intimate relationships in their home areas and there seemed to be a relationship between feelings about home and the participants' overall feelings about where they would like to be.

Some of the participants acknowledged the presence of difficult feelings in their current settings and these were linked to feelings of being away from home.

"It's a bit upsetting 'cos you're away from home and stuff" (Callum)

Sam expressed that his current setting is not where he wishes to be and wanted to return home because:

"It's where I live. It's where I'm from. I'd rather be there" (Sam)

There was an intensity and insistency to the short and sharp phrases Sam used to describe his feelings, which seemed to reflect an anger about being away from his home. There appeared to be an underlying anger in Sam's words that suggested there remains an emotional pull and attachment to his home area that causes him to feel upset about being away from this place.

Andrew expressed his unhappiness about being in his current setting in terms of the distance from his home town.

"I'm like what 60 miles away from (home town)" (Andrew)

Andrew appears to express the emotional difficulty he feels from being away from family and friends in terms of the physical distance from his home area. Andrew also described his alienation from previous family and friends as a result of the move:

"My mates and my family. Not seen none of them but my sister" (Andrew)

Callum described upset feelings at the time of the move due to the period of time spent in a previous care home. Once again, this seemed to suggest an emotional bond to his previous home area and a sense of being away from the place where he feels at home.

“I was upset because I used to live in a kids home before here and I lived there for about four years. I was a bit upset that I had to move from there” (Callum)

The difficult feelings described by participants suggest an absence or distance from close emotional bonds and attachments. This is suggestive of a distance from secure attachment figures (Bowlby, 1963). It is possible that without these attachments the participants do not appear to see their placements as being a home, despite describing feelings of normality and belonging in the placements.

This interpretation suggests that participants’ did not experience secondary attachment figures who could give them a comparable feeling of closeness and emotional intimacy in their placements. This was hinted at in Callum’s account where he describes how adults support him emotionally ‘if they are able’, suggesting there are times when adults are not able to get close enough to Callum’s emotional world when this is needed. However, the interpretation that participants did not experience close attachment figures is somewhat tentative due to the limited amount of detail in the participants’ accounts about this aspect of their experiences.

The participants did not describe emotionally intimate relationships in their accounts. Most of the participants disagreed with the statement “I have close friends”. This seemed to suggest that real closeness in the friendships experienced by participants was missing in their current placements. Sam described his closest peers as being “just friends...not best friends, just my friends rather”. Similarly, Craig noted a lack of closeness in his relationships to peers:

“The only one I do (feel close to) is J who I live with. And that’s it really” (Craig)

Participants may have felt that they have closer friends in their home town or believed closer friendships would have been possible had they remained in their home areas. For the participants, their experience appears to be of not forming close attachments to peers or adults. This may reflect insecure attachment styles, which could mean that it was difficult for the participants to form close bonds easily. However, it is important to note the placement change experienced by participants meant that they needed to form a number entirely new relationships with others. This, in itself, could have been a barrier to the formation of close attachments in these placements.

Participants experienced the absence of close friendships differently. Craig reflected on this experience as not being so important, noting “I’m quite used to it” and highlighted how he prioritised work over friendships:

“I get on well with others but when I’m doing my work it dunt really matter. I’m not really focusing on them. I’m more focusing on my work.” (Craig)

On the surface, this suggests that an emotional distance from others was not a difficult aspect of Craig’s experience. However, Craig seems to be playing down the value of close relationships by suggesting he doesn’t particularly need them. The phrase “I’m quite used to it” seems to suggest an underlying awareness of the value of close relationships. Focusing on work rather than friendships could have been a coping mechanism that enabled Craig to experience more structure and predictability in his placement.

There were contrasts between the feelings about home across participants and there appeared to be a relationship between feelings of belonging and feelings of where participants would like to be. In two of the interviews, the feelings of being away from home left the participants wishing they could return to their home area, but in two of the interviews participants felt happy to be in their current placements.

“At the time (of the move) not too happy, but I am happy with the decision” (Craig)

“I didn’t really want to move out of (home town) but erm...I give it a chance-but it’s worked out well for me” (Callum)

Although Callum expressed difficult feelings about being away from home, this seemed to be weighed up against his overall feeling of preferring to be in his current setting. For Callum, this led him to ultimately accept these feelings and reason that being away from home was for the best.

“I’m happy here. It’s better to be in a place you’re happy with than not happy.” (Callum)

Across the accounts, there is a tension in the participants’ accounts between positive experiences about the support and belonging provided by the placements and feelings of emotional distance or alienation. For Callum, being in a more stable place outweighed the difficulties of being away from home, even though he appeared to be at a distance from the security and love of secure attachment figures. This was in contrast to Andrew, who was able to recognise some of the advantages of being in a more stable environment but this did not seem to make up for the distance from close attachment figures.

#### **4.3.2 A lack of influence on the change in placement**

A theme emerging across all the interviews was that participants did not have a meaningful influence on the decision to place them in an out of authority residential educational placement. There was variation in the degree to which participants felt included in discussions about the change of placement. However, in all cases the decision to move hinged on the views of responsible adults. There was a sense of inevitability in the move for some participants and even feelings of being overpowered. The feelings of participants at the time of the move varied across participants from acceptance to anger.

Some comments highlight a sense of inevitability in the move even whilst the participants were involved in discussions about it.

“It was sort of like it was going to happen anyway.” (Craig)

One participant felt that he was listened to but his views were not able to influence the decision.

“I said I don’t really want to come but if I have to I have to.” (Callum)

Sam vividly described how the decision to move was beyond his control and beyond his power to resist it.

“I didn’t want to come here but I had to come. I’d get dragged here but I don’t really want to be dragged here so I just came.” (Sam)

Sam seemed to accept the move, but only because he knew from previous experience that he did not have the power to influence decisions of this kind.

The level of participation in decision-making processes has been classified according to a ladder of participation (Arnstein, 1969). This ranges from: being excluded; being given information; tokenistic involvement; being informed and consulted with and active participation. From the accounts of three of the participants, it emerged that they were involved in the decision about the move in a tokenistic way since they were unable to contribute meaningfully to the decision. Craig’s comment (above) suggests that he was aware of the tokenistic nature of his involvement at the time of the discussions.

The level of participation that Andrew experienced was even less than the other participants, suggesting that he was excluded from the decision-making process entirely. Andrew noted that the move had not even been discussed with him. He was not given prior warning of the move and his experience was even of being deceived by adults at the time.

“They packed my bags and said they were cleaning my room. Then into the car and took me here.” (Andrew)

Andrew's account suggests that he experienced a complete lack of communication from his carers about the move. It is not possible to explore how this might have happened in the interview as it was felt that this was likely to be too sensitive an area to probe into.

Three of the participants expressed that they accepted the placement change, despite it being against their wishes. This suggested that participants could have become desensitised to the experience of changing placement, having perhaps experienced the same lack of influence when decisions have been made over their care placements at earlier points in their lives. For some participants, this could have been a process that is similar to institutionalisation: the experience of having no influence over placement changes could have become so familiar that it is no longer upsetting.

In contrast, Andrew responded angrily to the move:

"Tried to set the car on fire...it didn't work"

This comment seems to reflect Andrew's feeling of anger at those responsible for moving him against his will, perhaps due to the suddenness of the move. In this comment, Andrew appears to recognise his own lack of agency at this time in relation to adult authorities.

The experiences of the participants reflects a lack of agency in a key decision that effected their lives. This could have been experienced as a difficult and unfair event by participants. However, the accounts of most the participants seem to illustrate more complex feelings about this. Although one participant (Andrew) was angry about the move, others (Callum and Craig) reflected that whilst they did not wish to move, they ultimately felt that their changes in placement were for the best. Sam's comment (above) suggests a feeling of reluctant acceptance, which also hints that Sam may have had some sense of the move being in his best interest. The experiences of most of the participants, therefore, do not appear to be entirely of experiencing disempowerment, but rather of a tension between the difficulties arising from a lack of agency and the acceptance of a decision made by others that was felt to be in their best interests.



### **Reflexive Commentary**

I was surprised at how most of the participants experienced the move to an out of authority placement without anger despite this being against their wishes. I feel this surprise reflected my own professional values that children and young people should be listened to and involved when key decisions are made. Indeed, this influenced my decision to ask participants about this aspect of their experience and appears, therefore, to have contributed to the construction of this theme. The participants' experience of not having agency in the decision to move was more complicated than I expected. Reflecting on my own assumptions around this helped me to take a fresh perspective on this aspect of their experience. This highlighted the tension between the lack of agency of participants and their acceptance of the decision to move, suggesting participants had some awareness that the decision was made in their best interests.

#### **4.3.3 Emotional support or independence and self-reliance**

Another theme emerging from the analysis concerned participant's feelings towards emotional support available to them in the setting. However, participants experienced emotional support in a variety of ways.

Two of the participants spoke about a supportive community within the setting, with a particular emphasis on the support that staff could provide them with at times of difficulty:

"Some of the senior staff have helped me and some of the school teachers. If I went through them all there would be a massive list." (Callum)

"Everyone really helps each other...any problems I have, everyone helps." (Craig)

One participant (Craig) spoke about how staff could help him deal with more difficult feelings when these arose, such as anger. Similarly, another participant (Callum) spoke about close emotional support that staff could provide when he has difficult feelings,

seeming to emphasise the importance of the physical and emotional contact made during these encounters:

“If I was upset or something they would probably come put their arm around me say “what’s wrong” stuff like that” (Callum).

These participants appear to have experienced emotional containment from adults at times when they have had difficult feelings in their placements. Their comments suggest that adults provided a shared space where feelings are accepted and worked through together.

The term containment in psychology was introduced as a psychodynamic concept by Bion (1962). In Bion’s theory, containment refers to the process that takes place when the difficult feelings of a patient (or infant) are projected onto the analyst (or mother). Containment is said to take place when the analyst (or mother) is able to process these feelings and feed them back in a way that is manageable to the patient (infant).

The experience of containment, therefore, refers to the participants’ experiences of being able to tolerate and manage their feelings within the context of their relationships with supportive adults. The comments above suggest that Callum and Craig experienced emotional containment within a supportive community, rather than from particular secondary attachment figures. However, the relatively short length of interviews meant that there was only a small amount of detail in the participants’ accounts about these experiences. More detail in the accounts around these experiences could have been helpful to lend further support to this interpretation or to challenge this perspective.

Previous settings were described by participants in a way that seemed to be confining, with an absence of physical and emotional space. Andrew described a place where “I just sit in a room”, suggesting that Andrew’s experience was of segregation and confinement. Callum made similar comments reflecting a lack of emotional space and support in a previous setting: “At (former school) you just used to get restrained a lot. Here they’ll talk you down.” His comment seemed to describe an increase in the emotional space and containment for feelings in his current setting. These comments suggest participants did not

experience emotional containment in previous placements. The participants' comments indicate they were confined to areas away from others, suggesting that there was not a shared space where their feelings could be contained.

For some of the participants, a sense of greater physical space emerged in their accounts, which seemed to reflect more space for containing and managing their feelings within the residential educational placements than they had experienced previously. For Andrew, this was described in terms of no longer just sitting in a room. Other participants noted greater physical movement between classes in the residential educational setting: "You move around classes more" (Callum). Another comment suggested that the physical movement between classes provided a valuable change in interpersonal space that supported the participant in managing his feelings more easily.

"I like it. 'Cos you know it's better than having one teacher for all lessons. Because if you are not getting on with them in one lesson then you don't have to put up with them in another lesson. You always know that you are going to another teacher." (Craig)

These comments suggested participants experienced a transition from smaller 'pressure cooker' like environments to larger settings where physical space, movement and changes of Teacher supported them in managing and regulating their feelings. In this way, the physical environments and routines in the settings also appear to have had a role in supporting the emotional containment of the participants in their residential educational placements.

The accounts differed in terms of their descriptions of adult support. For Andrew, the importance of peers was highlighted. The role of peers was set in contrast to those of adults, who seem to be experienced by Andrew more as authority figures. This contrasts with the view of adults providing a containing role in Callum's account. Andrew explained how it would be a friend who supports him if he is having a difficult time in a lesson.

"If I go out of lesson. I go for a 'cig with him. He says 'calm down, go back in lesson, get your head down and just chill out." (Andrew)

Andrew's experience of emotional support from peers contrasts with the way adults are experienced as figures of authority who are responsible for discipline:

"It's mostly get back to lessons...it's not that fair no." (Andrew)

This could reflect different constructions between Andrew and other participants on the role of adults in the settings, with Andrew constructing adults as being disciplinarian as oppose to being supportive. It is also possible that there was a different ethos in the setting Andrew attended, with a firmer approach to discipline.

One interview contrasted with the other participants' accounts of the importance of emotional support during their placements. Sam described his experience of emotional support being available in the setting, but emphasised that this was not of real importance to him.

"If I need to talk to someone, I just talk to someone. But I don't talk to people that much."

For Sam, adults in the setting do not seem to have had a significant role. He indicated they are just doing "their job". This seems to suggest that Sam did not place importance on the experience of emotional support that adults could offer him. Sam did not appear to value his relationship with adults in the setting.

Sam's dismissal of the value of emotional support could suggest that he had a construction of a masculine gender identity that requires men to be self-reliant and emotionally strong. Although Sam does not state this view on masculine identity explicitly in the interview, he appears to emphasise his strength and masculinity in his comment above. Some of Sam's other comments also suggest that he valued masculine ideals, such as strength and independence:

"I feel safe wherever I am" (Sam).

A masculine identity may have meant that, for Sam, emotional support from others was experienced as potentially threatening to his identity. There is an interesting contrast between Sam's account of independence and Callum's account of his openness to emotional support in his placement. This could perhaps reflect different constructions of masculinity, leading to these participants having different experiences of learning how to 'be a man'.

#### **Reflexive Commentary**

I noticed that the participants' experiences of physical restraint in behaviour provisions stirred up my own memories and feelings from working in a pupil referral unit in which restraint regularly took place. This brought to mind a number of negative associations I have of this practice from personal experience. It was important to be aware of this and not impose my own feelings about this topic, which was tending towards focusing on criticism of the restraint that participants had previously experienced. By setting aside these concerns, it was easier to focus on what the participants were actually describing. Rather than criticising the physical restraint they had experienced, participants appeared to be emphasising their experience of spaces in their residential placements where their feelings could be tolerated and managed. It was this experience of available space that had resonance with Bion's (1962) theory of emotional containment.

#### **4.3.4 Structure, routine and boundaries**

It emerged that the residential placements provided participants with greater structure and boundaries than they had experienced in previous placements. There were both positive and negative connotations of this aspect of their experience for the participants. In some of the interviews, participants talked about having an experience of education that they had not had previously due to non-attendance, whilst one participant found it hard to adapt to the boundaries he experienced in his residential educational placement.

Three of the participants described running away in the past but no longer did this in their residential educational placements. Sam found it hard to compare his experience of residential education with his earlier school experiences, saying 'I didn't really go' in the

past. Running away was described as being common in the earlier lives of two of the participants. Andrew commented, “I am not normally in school-I just run off”. Similarly, Callum described a lack of structure and boundaries in the past, indicating that he was “running away. I used to drink, smoke, do all sorts of things...get arrested”.

It emerged that the residential educational settings had provided structure, through the presence of routine and boundaries throughout the days for the participants. Callum described clear routines throughout the week and the presence of plenty of activities to occupy his time. He noted he is “never bored” and “you’re always doing sommat”. Craig also described liking to keep busy: “I don’t like sleeping. I like to do something”. All the participants described doing activities they enjoy.

Andrew articulated the presence of boundaries in terms of the disciplinary responses to his behaviour in the setting.

“If I don’t get my head down, I kick off. I get held” (Andrew)

Out of context, Andrew’s comment may be interpreted as a criticism of a punitive approach in the setting. However, in the context of our conversation, it appears as though Andrew was describing how a firm response from staff enabled him to concentrate on work and remain in lessons. The language used was consistent with Andrew’s description of adults as being authoritarian throughout his account.

For three of the participants, it could be interpreted that the presence of structure and boundaries appeared to provide a containing role for their behaviour. There was a contrast between participants’ earlier life experiences of truancy and of their experience in residential education of remaining within the settings. This suggests that the stability of placements and continuity of care and education meant that participants experienced more secure boundaries than they had in the past. Once again, this experience resonates with Bion’s (1962) theory of emotional containment: by providing secure boundaries for behaviour, the settings appear to have created a kind of holding space where the

participants were able to feel secure and protected, no longer needing to run away or truant.

The experience of making educational progress in their residential educational placements was clearly of importance to the participants. For two of the participants, remaining within the setting has provided them with the positive experience of receiving an education, which they had not experienced previously. One participant highlighted the importance of being able to concentrate on his education in the placement. Another participant indicated that the best aspect of his experience had been gaining an education.

“My levels are getting better... (I feel) alright. I mean, I missed the whole of year seven.”  
(Andrew)

“I would say-getting an education ‘cos at (previous setting) I wasn’t at all. I was just running around there, but I’m getting an education and actually being here now.” (Callum)

However, the presence of boundaries and structure in the settings were on the whole experienced negatively by Andrew. Andrew noted that boundaries could impact on personal freedoms that were available previously, such as drinking, smoking and being with his friends. Andrew reasoned he would prefer to be in his home town as he “can get served” and said if there was one thing that could improve his experience it would be the presence of a “smoking shelter”.

Andrew’s view of adult support as being controlling and limiting his freedom in the setting recall’s Baumrind’s (1991) authoritarian parenting style, which is characterised by being controlling: setting limits on behaviour without sensitivity to the emotional needs of children. In Andrew’s case, he appears to have experienced a lack of understanding of his need for personal freedom and independence, which could have led him to see adults as authoritarian figures.

The experience of structure and boundaries in Andrew’s account contrasts with the experience of emotional containment in other accounts. Andrew’s experience appears to

have been that the boundaries in place were unable to contain his behaviour, which led to conflict and behaviour that was out of control.

“No one can stop me doing whatever I do. If I get hurt I get hurt”

Andrew appears to have experienced insecurity in his placement as a result of adults not being able to contain his behaviour: Andrew indicated he did not feel safe in the setting. There may be a relationship between Andrew’s account of feeling insecure within the setting and his wish to return to his home town. This contrasts with Callum’s account of experiencing emotional support and security and his feeling that he is in the place he would rather be in.

#### **4.3.5 Normality and belonging**

A final theme that emerged in some way in all the participants’ accounts was the experience of normality and a sense of belonging in their residential placements. This emerged in accounts of the normality of the routines in the placements and of the experience of generally fitting in and getting along with peers. A sense of belonging was reflected in the accounts of three of the participants, although one participant’s account suggested that he did not feel a sense of belonging in the setting.

A sense of belonging is clearly evoked in Craig’s account:

“I was expecting it (the current setting) to be like one of my previous care homes. Not too nice. Not getting the most amount of support. Not feeling like I’m meant to be there. (It’s) completely the opposite.” (Craig)

Participants also highlighted that their experience was typical of the educational experiences of young people rather than of receiving a specialist kind of education:

“I just enjoy it...it’s just a school” (Craig)

“I don’t mind it here-it’s just a boarding school” (Sam)



These comments give a sense of feeling part of the school community and of an ordinary kind of life in school rather than feeling segregated or singled out. They suggest a genuine sense of inclusion in the school. Participants also seem to stress the normality of their experience by highlighting that the settings are schools. This opposes a potential construction of residential educational placements as being places where children and young people are given specialist ‘treatment’ for their emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Participants also described fitting in and getting on with peers. All the participants spoke about having friendships in the setting and agreed with the statement ‘I get on with others’ in the diamond ranking activity. Participants noted they found it easy to make friends.

“I fit in quite easy” (Callum)

“I was nervous at first but soon settled in” (Craig)

These comments emphasise a kind of normality for the participants in their school experiences. They suggest the participants experienced that it was relatively easy to adapt to their placements and mix with others. This resonates with Maslow’s (1968) hierarchy of needs, suggesting that these participants were able to meet their needs for a sense of belonging and acceptance in their placements. This may have allowed them to focus in higher level needs like furthering their education.

However, it is important to note that Andrew’s account contrasted with those of the other participants in terms of the normality of the experience for him. Andrew described the experience of being in the placement as being challenging due to the unfamiliarity of being in a school setting.

“I am not normally in school” (Andrew)

Andrew noted that this was very different from his more familiar routine of truanting from school with his friends. Andrew had previously been free to go where he wanted to in his home town and his account evoked a greater sense of belonging in his previous life.

It is possible that Andrew did not feel the same sense of belonging in his placement as some of his behaviour was not tolerated and this caused conflict. Andrew's experience appears to be that he did not feel accepted or valued by adults in the setting. This can be seen in Andrew's description of how he feels adults viewed him in the setting:

"They obviously don't like me swearing. They don't like me smoking." (Andrew)

Andrew wanted to move back to his home town, suggesting that Andrew may have preferred to be somewhere where he felt a sense of belonging. He does not appear to have been able to prioritise higher goals, such as his education, in his residential educational placement. This seems to reflect a feeling of not belonging in this placement.

#### **Reflexive Commentary**

In my initial interpretation of this theme I felt that participants' were conveying that they wanted to be viewed as normal and did not want to be seen as being different from their peers. I felt that this was why they were emphasising the normality of their experiences on their accounts. However, on further reflection I noticed this interpretation reflected one of my own prior assumptions, which is that LAC are concerned about being singled out in school. Whilst this may be true for the participants in this research, on reflection it did not appear to be conveyed in their accounts. The interpretation that participants experienced a sense of belonging and normality, therefore, seemed to provide a better sense of their experiences.

#### **4.4 Individual synopses of accounts**

This section presents holistic synopses of each participant's account. These are the researcher's own interpretations, which were written once the analysis across cases had been carried out.

#### **4.4.1 Callum**

Callum's experience of out of authority residential education seemed to involve positive life changes for him, creating a place in his life in which he felt happy. At the time of the move, Callum felt upset, having lived in his previous care home for a number of years. However, feeling that the decision for the move was not in his control, he accepted this. Having been in this setting for two years, Callum felt that things had worked out for the best.

Since the move, Callum received an education and this was important to him. Previously, Callum had often run away and could not settle in school. He was also getting in trouble for anti-social behaviour with the police. These difficulties seem to have been the reasons for Callum's change of placement. For Callum, it was the support of staff that helped him to make progress and learn to manage his feelings. He experienced being in a supportive community and valued the help of senior staff, as well as the teachers and staff who worked with him on a daily basis. There was more physical and emotional space for Callum in this setting, and he was no longer getting restrained, which had been a problem for Callum in the past.

Callum's experience in the out of authority placement was of fitting in easily with others, although he did not experience a real closeness in his friendships. Sometimes his peers were annoying but generally were easy to get on with. There was a lot of routine in his week and, in a way, it was just like going to a 'normal' school. It is a place where people were pleased to see him. He felt included and was kept busy with lots of activities.

Callum also acknowledged difficult feelings he experienced from being away from home. However, Callum reflected, it was better for him to be in a place where he was happy than in a place where he was not.

*Interpretation.* Callum appears to have experienced a sense of belonging in his placement. He appears to have experienced emotional containment within his relationships with

supportive adults in the setting. However, there is a sense of missing the real intimacy of close attachments in Callum's home area. Callum's experience highlights a transformation in his life from instability, truancy and youth offending to gaining an education. In this way, the placement appears to have supported Callum's resilience.

### **Reflexive Commentary**

I found Callum relaxed and easy to talk to in the interview, which gave the impression of Callum feeling very much at ease in the setting. In some ways, the content of Callum's account may have been influenced by the interview situation: he may have been more inclined to talk about the positive aspects of his experience with an unfamiliar adult and perhaps less able to discuss difficult aspects (such as his feelings about being away from home). I also sensed that there was a feeling of loyalty from Callum towards the setting, meaning that he would perhaps wish to give a good account of the school. Although Callum's experience appears to have been positive, it is possible that he did not give voice to the more difficult aspects of his experience in the interview.

### **4.4.2 Craig**

Craig seemed happy in his placement. From our conversation, it appeared as though Craig had found a greater sense of belonging in his residential educational placement. Craig experienced difficulties in his previous care setting and felt out of place there. He was involved in discussions about the change in placement. However, Craig did not have any real influence in the decision, sensing it was going to happen anyway.

In his out of authority residential educational placement, Craig said he was sometimes unhappy. However, he felt he could get help from others for any problems he experienced, being within a supportive community. Craig got the support he needed when he was angry. He was also able to move around classes more so there was always a fresh start waiting for him if he had a bad lesson.

Craig described being able to settle in quickly and get on easily with others in this setting. However, his experience was of a lack of close friendships. Craig was used to this though and suggested that he didn't mind. Craig liked to keep his head down in lessons and kept himself occupied when he had time alone.

*Interpretation.* Craig appears to have experienced emotional containment in his placement through the support of adults, physical space and the presence of routines that enable him to keep occupied. Craig also appears to have experienced a greater sense of belonging than in the past, which seems to have enabled him to focus on higher goals, such as his education. Craig does not appear to have experienced truly close relationships. This could reflect difficulties in forming close friendships that can result from a change in placement. It is possible that Craig felt insecure around forming close relationships with others, feeling more secure when he was not dependent on others.

#### **Reflexive Commentary**

My impression of Craig was that he was a little unsure about engaging in the conversation. Craig was friendly but a little closed off in the interview. Noticing this, helped me to reflect on Craig's experience of other people in the placement. This suggested Craig may find emotional intimacy difficult, preferring to keep some distance from others. I found that Craig was mainly positive in his account of out of authority education. I wondered if the interview situation influenced the account that Craig gave: when talking to an unfamiliar adult Craig may have preferred to give a positive account of his experiences. Craig may have found it more difficult to talk about more troubling feelings related to being away from his family.

#### **4.4.3 Sam**

Sam did not have any influence on the decision to move to this placement. Even if he had tried to resist the move Sam felt he would have been 'dragged' to the new setting by the adults responsible for the move. However, not wanting this, Sam didn't cause a fuss.

Sam was reasonably happy with the residential educational placement, feeling that he got on with others and found that it was a normal boarding school education. Sam had friends, but did not consider them his best friends. He also did not have close emotional ties with staff. There was an absence of real emotional intimacy in Sam's experience: friends were just friends; staff were just doing their job.

Sam said he didn't really attend school in the past. In the residential educational placement, he was receiving education that he had not accessed previously. Sam said he didn't experience any problems in the setting, noting that he always felt safe and didn't need anyone to talk to.

Overall, Sam seemed like was reasonably happy in his placement. However, he would rather have been in his home town.

*Interpretation.* Sam appears to have experienced a sense of belonging in the placement. He seems to have been emotionally self-contained and independent in the setting. This suggests Sam may have felt more comfortable managing his feelings independently of others rather than forming close trusting relationships in which his feelings are shared. It is possible that an avoidant style of attachment means that Sam was unwilling to be dependent on others, feeling, on some level that this support would have been unreliable. In light of this, self-reliance could have been a coping mechanism for Sam. Sam's experience of educational engagement could be seen as having promoted his resilience. However, Sam's wish to return home suggests underlying feelings of missing attachment figures and support within his home area.

#### **Reflective Commentary**

Sam did not seem particularly engaged during the interview and gave short responses. I wondered if this was a defensive response to a situation in which an unfamiliar adult was asking about his experiences. The challenges of this situation may have reflected a preference for being independent and not sharing feelings with others. This led me to wonder if Sam experienced difficulty being dependent on others in his placement and that this may have prevented him from forming trusting relationships easily.

#### **4.4.4 Andrew**

Andrew was unhappy about his placement and wanted to go back home. He missed his friends and family. Only Andrew's sister had been to visit him during his time in the setting. Andrew was also angry at the time of the move, having been abruptly taken from a former care placement and taken to his new setting without prior warning or explanation.

In the past, Andrew used to run away and did not attend school. In the residential educational placement, Andrew was remaining in the setting, but the experience of being in school was strange and challenging for him. For Andrew, staff were experienced as figures of authority. He could come into conflict with them by pushing boundaries: swearing; drinking alcohol and smoking. Andrew's behaviour was sometimes out of control in the setting. He missed the freedom he used to experience when he was with his friends in his home town.

Andrew found that discipline from adults helped him to keep on task in lessons. In this placement, Andrew had been engaging in an education and had made good progress. Andrew felt good about this. He also valued his friends in the setting, who helped him to calm down when he was upset. Despite this, Andrew wanted to be back in his home town.

#### **Reflexive Commentary**

Andrew was initially reluctant to take part in the interview and I found him quite agitated at first. I wondered if Andrew felt insecure and wanted to be in control at the start of the interview, which might have reflected his relationships with adults in the setting. Andrew paused reflectively when talking about his family, suggesting the presence of difficult feelings from their absence. I found myself feeling quite protective towards Andrew towards the end of our conversation and noticed that, at the end of the interview, Andrew appeared to want to continue the conversation rather than return to class. Reflecting on this suggested that Andrew may have found the close adult attention in the interview reassuring. He may not have wanted to separate from this feeling of support at the end of the interview.

*Interpretation.* Andrew did not appear to experience a true sense of belonging in his placement, not feeling accepted by others. He also seemed to experience difficult feelings of loss and insecurity from the distance between himself and attachment figures in his home town. Andrew appears to have come into conflict with boundaries as a result of behaviour that could not be contained in the setting. Adults did not seem to be understanding of Andrew's need for independence, leading them to be experienced as figures of authority. It is possible that Andrew's attachment style means he has an underlying need to feel in control of situations due to underlying feelings of insecurity. This could have created conflict with adults in the setting. Andrew's positive experience of educational engagement appears to have been outweighed by the difficulties he experienced in the residential educational placement.

#### **4.5 Summary**

In this chapter, five main themes have been discussed that emerged in the analysis. It was found that participants experienced difficult feelings of being away from home. This was discussed in relation to attachment theory and the possible absence of secondary attachment figures for the participants in their residential educational placements. Participants also experienced a lack of influence in the decision for them to be placed in out of authority residential education. This highlighted a tension between a lack of agency for the participants at this time in their lives and acceptance of the role of adults in making decisions that were in their best interests. The third theme discussed was of the participants' experience of emotional support in the placements. This suggested that the placements offered some of the participants an experience of emotional containment. The experience of structure and secure boundaries also appeared to support the experience of containment for some of the participants and enabled the participants to experience educational engagement. The final theme discussed was the experience of belonging and normality, which was understood from the point of view of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

The synopses highlight the variability in the participants' experiences and suggest that a general understanding of the experiences of out of authority residential education for LAC



could not fully capture the individual experiences of LAC in these placements. For two of the participants, their residential educational placements have resulted in positive life changes. This could be seen as having helped to promote their resilience. However, for two participants, the advantages of the placements were outweighed by the difficulties of being away from home.

## 5 Discussion

The previous chapter discussed five themes which emerged from the analysis of data. These were the experience of:

- A distance from home and from emotional intimacy;
- A lack of influence on the change of placement;
- Emotional support or of independence and self-reliance;
- Structure, routines and boundaries;
- Normality and belonging.

This chapter will consider the implications of these findings and possible areas for future research. As discussed earlier, the findings can only be claimed to say something about the lived experiences of the participants in this study, given that this is ideographic research. These findings do not represent a description of the lived experience of LAC in out of authority residential educational placements that can be generalised to all LAC in these placements. This chapter discusses how the findings from this study could be of value for professional reflection and also for highlighting some of the issues and dilemmas around the placement of LAC in out of authority residential educational provision. In doing this, the findings will be related to perspectives discussed earlier in the critical literature review of this thesis.

### 5.1 Key areas from this research for professional reflection

In the last chapter, it was argued that the individual synopses provide evidence of the diversity of experiences of LAC in out of authority education. From these synopses we can see there were a variety of ways in which the participants experienced emotional support, structure and boundaries and being away from home. This research suggests that residential educational placements can be a positive experience for some LAC, leading to improved educational outcomes, whilst for others it may be a difficult experience as a result of the distance they are from friends, family and their home communities. The variability in the experiences of participants in this study underlines how important it is for professionals to carefully consider the individual circumstances and needs of LAC to inform decisions related to placements of this kind.

### **5.1.1 Participation in decision-making**

The findings from this study draw attention to the degree to which LAC in out of authority educational placements are meaningfully engaged in the decision to move to these placements. The experiences of participants in this research ranged from a tokenistic engagement in the decision to having no influence on this decision at all. This lack of engagement in decision-making has been found in other research concerning decisions related to the placement of children and young people in residential educational settings (Pellicano et al., 2014) and in research related to the participation of LAC in important decisions that affect their lives (Thomas & O’Kane, 1999). Arguably, this could challenge professionals to think about the ways LAC could be more meaningfully involved in the decisions to place them in out of authority residential educational provision.

In the recent SEN code of practice, there is an emphasis towards the use of person-centred planning to inform decisions related to the educational provision for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) (DfE/DoH, 2014). Person-centred planning places greater emphasis on the importance of the views of children and young people in decision-making. It is possible that the approaches of services that result from the new code of practice will mean that LAC could begin to experience a greater influence in decisions related to their placement in out of authority provision. There may also be a need to challenge the views of professionals and carers in some cases where it is felt that LAC do not have the ability to contribute meaningfully to the decisions affecting their lives (Thomas & O’ Kane, 1999).

However, it is also important to consider the potential complexity around involving LAC in key decisions, which may have inhibited the involvement of the participants in this study in the decisions to move to their residential educational placements. For the participants in this research, it may have been felt by responsible adults that there was a need to make a decision that protected their best interests. This could have prevented the participants in this study being more fully engaged in the decision to place them in out of authority provision.

Two of the participants in this study felt positive about their placements at the time of the interview, despite expressing they did not want to move at the time of the decision. This seems to highlight the potential importance of some decisions being made according to what is considered to be the in best interests of LAC, even when this is not consistent with their views. Additionally, in these two cases, the participants were involved to some extent, in conversations about the move. It seems likely that this could have supported their transitions to out of authority placements. However, two of the participants did not feel they had any involvement in the decision to move placement. There may well be other cases where LAC could be more meaningfully involved in the decision-making related to their placement in out of authority residential educational provision.

The findings from this study highlight the tension between the need to protect the rights of LAC to participate in decisions and the need to make decisions that are felt to be in the best interests of LAC in order to protect their safety and well-being. This is a tension that is also apparent in the placement of children during family court hearings (Mantle, 2007) and decisions related to educational placements (Burden, 2007; Norwich & Kelly, 2007). In relation to the placement of LAC in out of authority residential educational provision, the findings suggest that professionals need to balance the need to support the participation of LAC in this decision with an understanding of the potential advantages and risks of placement in a provision of this kind. These are likely to be difficult decisions that appear to require the sensitive and thoughtful engagement of professionals, as well as multi-agency collaboration across social care and educational services.

#### **5.1.2 Fostering secure attachments**

A second point of reflection arising from this research, concerns the distance of participants from close emotional ties and the lack of close relationships they experienced in their residential educational placements. This is a similar finding to Pellicano et al., (2014), who noted concerns about the depth of relationships for children and young people who are in residential educational placements. In the present study, the difficult feelings of one participant about being away from home seemed to be mitigated by the presence of visits home, whilst another participant seemed upset by his lack of contact with home. This suggests that these links with home could be an important factor in successful placements.

However, in many cases it seems likely that the individual and family circumstances of LAC in residential educational placements could influence the degree to which maintaining contact with family is possible.

The absence of close relationships for participants in this study suggests they did not form close bonds with secondary attachment figures in their placements. The findings from this study suggest there may be a need for key workers and significant adults to form close relationships with LAC in out of authority placements to try and provide them with the possibility of forming closer emotional ties. In this way, significant adults in the setting could take on the role of being secondary attachment figures (Ainsworth, 1989). These adults could provide LAC in residential educational placements with a safe base that supports them in managing feelings of distress and supports feelings of security. This is consistent with the views of other writers and researchers on the importance of good quality relationships in settings to support LAC manage feelings and feel emotionally secure (E.g. Dann, 2011; Gilligan, 2007). However, it is not clear from the present study what the potential impact of secondary attachment figures for LAC in residential educational placements would be. Further research would be helpful to explore whether LAC are able to form these kind of relationships with mentors or key workers in their placements and what the impact of these relationships might be on their experiences as a whole.

On the basis of the findings of this study, it could be difficult for some LAC to form secondary attachments in residential educational settings. For example, one of the participants in the study seemed to view adults mainly as figures of authority and another did not seem to see himself as needing any support from adults. This study highlights the importance of considering the individual ways in which LAC prefer to receive support and of adapting provision to suit their individual needs. The attachment styles of LAC may influence their relationships in residential educational settings and the way they prefer to be supported. For example, LAC with an insecure avoidant style of attachment may prefer to be independent and emotionally self-reliant (Geddes, 2006). An understanding of attachment styles could, therefore, be helpful in understanding how to provide emotional support and form secure relationships with LAC in residential educational settings.

### **5.1.3 Providing emotional containment**

On the whole, the views of participants suggest there may be a role for emotional containment provided by staff in residential educational settings. This was particularly evident in some participants' descriptions of how adults supported them to work through and manage their feelings. It is interesting that some participants found that this emotional support was found to be helpful from a range of adults, without the indication that one particular adult was a secondary attachment figure. This could suggest that a community of support in which emotional containment is possible could be as valuable as the emotional containment that could take place in the context of a relationship with a single secondary attachment figure. There may be a role for EPs in supporting residential educational staff to understand the emotional needs of LAC in these placements in terms of Bion's (1962) theory of containment.

The findings from this study suggest that the participants experienced greater emotional containment in out of authority residential educational settings than their previous local authority settings. Participants remarked on negative experiences of being restrained in earlier settings, where containment did not seem to take place. Although it is not possible to make any generalisations of this finding from the small sample in this research, this does prompt some reflection on why this might have been the case. One possibility could be that participants' experienced a different ethos and approach to behaviour in the residential educational placement to previous settings in their home local authority. However, this is a cautious interpretation based on the small amount of data in this study.

The absence of emotional containment may have affected the attendance of participants in school in the past. A previous study highlighted factors including peer pressure, behavioural issues and problems with peer relationships as contributing to poor attendance for LAC. (Northern Ireland DfE, 2011). The present study suggests that, in some cases, contextual factors in the settings attended by students may also contribute to poor attendance. In this study, participants linked experiences of physical restraint and being placed in time-out areas to difficulties in previous settings. This suggests there may be a role for external agencies in supporting settings in adopting approaches for managing the challenging behaviour of LAC that minimises punitive responses, such as restraint and isolation.

The findings from this study suggest that emotional containment may also be supported through the physical environment and the routines in residential educational settings. A potential advantage of some residential educational settings appears to be the large physical spaces that many of these provisions have. This seems to offer more personal space and physical movement in these settings. The physical environment of some residential educational settings could be more suited to meet the needs of some LAC in comparison to smaller local authority settings, which could feel 'like a pressure cooker' in comparison.

The wrap-around consistency of support in residential educational settings appears to have provided secure boundaries and a consistent quality of care for participants in this study. This finding is consistent with one of the arguments made in favour of residential educational provision by other researchers (Ainsworth & Hansen, 2005; Pilling et al., 2007). Consistency in support could help provide containment for some LAC who have difficulty self-regulating their feelings and behaviour. Similarly, the duration of placements is likely to foster the development of stable relationships and routines.

The present study highlights how, in some cases, these secure boundaries can be experienced positively, leading to improved attendance and engagement with education. However, this study also suggests that some LAC may have difficulties adapting to the boundaries imposed on them in residential educational settings, leading to difficulties in containing their feelings and behaviour in these settings. This could highlight the importance of establishing links within the communities of residential educational settings to give LAC more experience of independence outside of the setting.

The findings from this study suggest that emotional support needs to be adapted to suit the individual needs of LAC in residential educational settings. Some LAC may have a construction that males do not need emotional support or could see this as stigmatising. In many cases, it might be best for emotional support to be given as informally as possible, through everyday activities and the day-to-day relationships that LAC experience in these settings. Given that all participants in this study were male, it would be interesting to consider whether female LAC would have different experiences of emotional support in residential educational settings.

In addition, this study highlights the potential value of peers support for LAC in residential educational settings. Some LAC in residential educational settings may be more likely to form close bonds with peers than adults in the setting, which could be a valuable source of support. The use of approaches that promote peer support, therefore, seems worth considering for LAC in residential educational settings.

#### **5.1.4 Promoting resilience**

This study suggests that residential educational placement may promote the resilience of some LAC through supporting their educational outcomes. This was an important aspect of the placements for three of the participants in the study. Given the association between positive educational outcomes and other indicators of adjustment and well-being, success in education has been highlighted as a key factor in contributing to the resilience of LAC (Dent & Cameron, 2003; Martin & Jackson, 2002). From the point of view of educational engagement, the residential placements seem to have had a positive impact on the resilience of the participants in this study.

A concern raised in previous research is that the educational needs of LAC are not generally taken into consideration when out of authority placements are made, meaning the move could potentially be disruptive to their education (Thomson, 2007). However, this research does not lend support to these findings. In contrast, the findings suggest that, for some LAC, residential educational placements could support a greater level engagement in education. For some LAC, being in a setting that enables them to engage in an educational programme could support them in achieving better educational outcomes than would otherwise have been possible.

This study suggests that many LAC may value the positive experiences of gaining an education that is potentially offered by residential educational placements. Visser, Cole and Daniels (2002) found that schools that are successful at including children and young people with behavioural difficulties tend to shift targets from a focus on behavioural objectives to learning outcomes. For LAC in residential educational placements, a focus on educational goals and aspirations could help to promote the success of these placements. An approach



that values the educational attainments of LAC could help them to feel that their education is important, fostering positive engagement in residential educational placements.

Despite the potential advantages of residential education, this study also highlights the ways LAC can also be made more vulnerable in these placements as a result of the distance from sources of support in their home localities. Some participants mentioned difficult feelings that resulted from being away from home. The distance of LAC in out of authority placements from professionals in their home localities also means that they may be less likely to receive support from external agencies (Morris et al., 2003). Other research also suggests that the distance of children and young people in residential educational placements from their home areas means that transitions following placements can be difficult (Pellicano et al., 2014).

On the whole, the findings from this study lend some support the argument that residential education may promote the resilience of some LAC, through providing them with stability and more engagement in their education. However, this needs to be weighed against the risks of placing LAC away from sources of support in their home local authorities.

#### **5.1.5 Providing a sense of belonging**

Three of the participants emphasised the normality of their experience and sense of belonging in their placements. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a sense of belonging can be seen as an important holistic human need, which can be an underlying motivation for behaviour (Maslow, 1968). The present study suggests that enjoyment and success of LAC in residential education may relate to feeling a sense of belonging in these placements. This is consistent with Gilligan's (2007) argument that experiencing a sense of belonging in school is supportive of the educational outcomes of LAC. As with other research on the needs of LAC in education, this research highlights the importance of not singling out LAC in a way that makes them feel different from peers (e.g. Brewin & Statham, 2011; Ofsted, 2008).

This study offers an encouraging perspective that LAC may be able to feel a sense of belonging in out of authority residential educational placements. This was reflected in the

participants' relationships with peers and adults, their participation in enjoyable activities and experience of a 'normal' school life. This study suggests that fostering a sense of belonging for LAC in residential educational placements may be an important factor that could then enable them to focus on higher needs such as their education.

However, the findings from this study suggest that some LAC may not feel a sense of belonging in residential educational placements, which could lead to a difficult experience in the placement as a whole. It is possible that some LAC may have difficulties adapting to routines and behavioural expectations in residential educational settings. This could lead to feelings that they are not accepted because of their behaviour.

This study suggests that LAC who experience difficulties in residential educational placements may need to be supported to feel more valued and accepted, which could give them a greater sense of belonging in their placement. Although this study does not highlight particular approaches that could promote the sense of belonging of LAC in residential placements, it is possible that this could be supported by the presence of relationships that provide the core conditions from person-centred counselling. These are: congruence; unconditional positive regard and empathy (Rogers, 1967).

### **5.1.6 The Construction of the identities of LAC**

The accounts of the participants in this research could potentially challenge assumptions about the experiences of LAC in out of authority educational placements. The use of deficit-focused perspectives to understand the needs of LAC in education, including attachment theory (Dent & Cameron, 2003) and neurological perspectives (Dann, 2011), could potentially lead us to overlook the richness of the experiences of LAC in residential educational placements. The present study suggests that these experiences are, in many ways, typical of children and young people in education. For example, participants talked about fitting in with others, activities they enjoyed and their focus on educational achievement.

This present research highlights the unique and individual experiences of LAC in out of authority education, suggesting that some theoretical perspectives could give an

unbalanced impression of their lives. This supports the importance of reflection on the way that LAC in residential education are constructed in the accounts of professionals. This finding is consistent with previous research highlighting the way that the constructions of professionals can lead to perceptions of LAC and their families that are unrealistically negative, one-sided and presumptuous (Phillips, 2003).

## **5.2 The case for residential educational placements for LAC**

This research offers tentative support to the argument that the placement of some LAC in residential educational provision can lead to more positive educational outcomes for these children. Although the findings of this research cannot be generalised, they can be considered alongside previous research in this area (Lawler et al., 2014; Jones & Landsverk, 2005). The present study shows how the educational experiences offered by residential educational placements may well be valued by LAC. However, more rigorous research is still needed to evaluate the outcomes of residential educational placements for LAC.

The present study, however, presents a mixed picture of residential educational placements, highlighting concerns about these placements. For participants in this study, being a long way from home was the main area of concern. The degree to which LAC are able to visit home and maintain relationships with friends, family members or previous carers appears, therefore, to be an important area of consideration in the decisions to place LAC in residential educational settings.

Three of the participants in this study still considered their home local authority as being their home area. These participants either wished to return immediately or planned to return after the placement. The findings of this study lend some support to the argument that residential educational placements are problematic as they distance LAC from sources of support in their home communities (McGill, 2008). This raises an important point for professionals to consider around the risk of alienating LAC in out of authority residential educational settings. Arguably, this suggests that out of authority residential educational placements, although helpful in some cases, should be a last resort for LAC. As McGill (2008)

notes, out of authority education could be seen as a failure to meet the needs of children and young people within their home local authorities.

The findings of this research support Thomson's (2007) view that there is a need for good quality residential educational placements in more local authorities. The potential benefits of residential education for LAC suggests there may be a need for these kinds of settings in more local authorities. This could mean that more LAC could be placed in residential educational settings without moving them away from their home communities.

### **5.3 The Implications of this research**

This section will consider the implications of the research for professionals involved in supporting LAC in out of authority residential educational settings. This section will give specific reference to the implications for EPs. These will be considered in terms of the support for these children and young people at different ecological levels, according to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. This section will also consider the transitions of LAC between residential education placements and other settings.

#### **5.3.1 The microsystem**

*Promoting belonging.* Teaching and pastoral staff in residential educational placements could consider how they can foster a sense of belonging for LAC. This is likely to be promoted through establishing supportive communities where LAC experience acceptance and inclusion. EPs could support settings in developing approaches that could help to foster a sense of belonging for LAC. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a perspective that could help support understanding of the need for belonging and acceptance in settings.

*Fostering secure attachments.* Residential placements could consider the role of secondary attachment figures in settings to provide a secure base from which LAC can learn to manage and regulate their feelings. EPs are in a position to help settings understand attachment theory and the potential value of secondary attachment figures. Staff in residential settings could also consider how LAC experience relationships and emotional support. EPs could support understanding of the different attachment styles of LAC in these settings and how

styles of attachment relate to the ways in which LAC may form relationships and experience support.

*Providing emotional containment.* Setting staff could consider how they are able to provide emotional containment through the structure, routines, 'safe' spaces and supportive relationships in their settings. EPs could support teaching and pastoral staff in residential educational settings to understand what is meant by emotional containment and the role that supportive adults may have in providing emotional containment in their relationships with LAC.

*Promoting educational attainment.* The educational engagement of LAC in residential placements could be considered to promote the success of these placements. LAC are likely to benefit from programmes that are adapted to meet their individual learning needs and foster their participation and intrinsic motivation in learning. EPs could support settings in assessing and understanding the learning needs of LAC in these placements and helping to develop programmes that maximise their learning potential.

*Promoting richer narratives.* EPs have a potentially important role in helping to recognise and value the range of skills, experiences and interests of LAC in out of authority residential education. In this way, EPs could contribute to richer narratives about LAC that challenge deficit or reductive views. EPs may have skills to do this through exploring the views and experiences of LAC through a range of methods, including narrative and phenomenological approaches.

### **5.3.2 The mesosystem**

*Links with families and home communities.* Residential setting staff could consider how to maintain links with the families and supportive networks of looked after children through visits where this is possible. Consideration should also be given to how links can be made with home communities to develop plans to support the transitions of looked after children into employment or further education following placements.

*Links with the home local authority.* LAC are likely to need supportive links between the residential placements and professionals within their home local authorities. Multi-agency involvement seems necessary to plan, monitor and evaluate programmes of support for LAC in these placements.

### **5.3.3 The exosystem**

*Prioritisation of LAC in residential education.* Local Authorities could consider the prioritisation of LAC in residential educational placements. This has implications for Educational Psychology services. These services could consider how service delivery models can enable EPs to provide support for LAC children in residential educational placements and develop joined up approaches with other agencies to support these children more effectively.

*Commissioning of settings.* Local authorities could consider the need for the commissioning of more residential educational settings, which could enable local authorities to meet the educational and care needs of more LAC within the authority.

### **5.4.5 Transitions**

*Participation of looked after children.* Consideration could be given towards how LAC can be included in decisions around placement in residential educational settings, balancing their rights for participation with the need to protect the best interests of LAC in placement decisions.

*Multi-agency involvement.* There should be consideration given to the need for multi-agency involvement in decisions related to the placement of LAC in residential educational provisions.

## **5.4 Areas for further research**

As stated earlier, there is still a gap in the evidence base for the outcomes of residential educational provision for LAC, meaning there is a need for studies taking a rigorous quantitative approach in this area. Studies of this kind would be helpful to consider

alongside qualitative studies, such as this one, in order to evaluate the outcomes of residential educational placements for LAC.

The present study is limited in its scope as it was carried out with a small number of participants. Further qualitative studies of this kind would also be helpful to consider alongside these findings, particularly with female participants. This research is also somewhat limited in scope given it is based on single-interviews with participants. In order to get a richer perspective of the experiences of LAC in out of authority residential educational placements, it could be beneficial for a researcher to spend more time in a residential educational setting to get further insight into the experiences of LAC in these placements. Ethnographic research could be a potentially useful way of approaching this. However, this would be a time-consuming piece of work and may not be achievable within the time frame of a doctoral thesis.

This study does not explore the processes through which LAC have been placed in out of authority education. Discussions with a Senior EP indicated that there are a large number of LAC in out of authority placements (around 80) within the local authority with parental responsibility for the participants in this study. An area for further research could consider the processes that have led to this situation. This could highlight changes that are needed to reduce the number of LAC placed in educational and care provision outside of their home local authorities.

## **5.5 Summary**

Given the ideographic nature of this research, it is not possible to generalise findings from this study to a wider population. However, a range of areas for professional reflection have been discussed. Some of the potential implications of this research have been considered at a range of different ecological levels. It has been discussed how this research highlights potential advantages of residential education for LAC, by providing them with stability and supporting their engagement with education. However, it also highlights the difficulties faced by LAC in these provisions from being placed at a distance from their home communities. Some possible avenues for future research have also been considered. This

highlighted the need for more rigorous research on the outcomes of LAC in out of authority residential educational placements.



## **6 Reflection**

This chapter provides a reflection on the study, which include a discussion of the limitations of this research. For the sake of clarity, some sections of this chapter are written in the first-person. There is a discussion of how this research has supported my own learning and professional development in terms of: learning about the research process; the way this research has influenced my educational psychology practice and the way the research will inform my work with LAC in out of authority residential educational settings.

### **6.1 Limitations to this study**

The first limitation to this study concerns the difficulties with generating sufficient data to allow for the interpretation needed in a good quality IPA analysis. However, having carried out the analysis, the data did allow for some interpretation. On the whole, there was sufficient detail in the transcripts to feel that these interpretations could emerge from my own engagement with the data. However, some interpretations were quite tentative given the relatively small amount of data in this research. For example, more detail in the participants' accounts around their relationships with key adults in the settings would have been helpful to either support or challenge the interpretation that the participants experienced emotional containment in their placements.

Given the difficulties in generating a substantive amount of data for this research, it may have been useful to have adopted a different methodology for this study. It was found that the diamond ranking activity used in the interviews was a helpful tool to support conversation in a non-invasive and relaxed way. In light of this, further use could have been made of this kind of activity to explore the views of the participants in this study. One possibility would have been to incorporate a full Q sort activity with the participants. This would have been similar to the diamond ranking activity, only using a larger number of statements. Through the use of a Q methodology approach, it would have been possible to carry out four separate single case studies by analysing each participant's Q sort independently (Watts & Stenner, 2012). It is possible that this would have yielded a richer quality of data than the interviews used in this study.

Another deliberation that emerged during this research was whether to analyse the data across cases or whether to carry out a by-person analysis. Having carried out the analysis, it was decided that both of these options were of value and should be kept in the thesis. On further reflection, it may have been helpful to focus on a by-person analysis. This could have helped to maintain the holistic nature of each account. A by-person analysis would have fit well with the phenomenological perspective that the experiencer and the experience should not be separated in the analysis. Given the variety in the experiences of the participants, there are some tensions which arise from presenting an analysis across cases in this research. On reflection, it could be argued that each participant's account describes a different lived experience, which could suggest they should be analysed separately.

A further criticism is the degree to which the study was free from my own assumptions and subjective bias. First of all, by including a diamond ranking activity it seems likely that my choice of statements steered the conversation in a way that influenced the themes emerging in the analysis. Similarly, the follow up questions asked in the interviews are also likely to have shaped the themes in this study to some extent (see reflexive commentary). For example, I was interested to know what the participants' experiences were of having a voice in the decision for them to move out of authority. I was also interested to learn about their experiences of emotional support in the setting. As a result, this appears to limit the extent to which this study can be seen as being genuinely phenomenological in the sense of emerging from the participants' lived experiences. It seems a more honest reflection on the findings to suggest that they are, to some extent, a co-construction between myself and the participants.

However, in defence of this research, it is important to note that the themes that emerged in the study went beyond the questions asked and the cards used in the diamond ranking activity. It could be argued that using a diamond ranking activity was justified since this helped to overcome some of the difficulties of probing into the experiences of vulnerable LAC.

Arguably, a final limitation to the study is that the sample was skewed. This is because participants were only approached whose current situation was felt to be stable. Therefore,

this could mean that participants in this study were more likely to have had experiences of out of authority residential education that were positive than potential participants who were not approached due to the instability of their placements. However, this was done for ethical reasons as the interview process could have been upsetting for participants who were not in stable placements.

## **6.2 Learning from carrying out this study**

### **6.2.1 The research process**

Carrying out this research has helped me to reflect on my own viewpoints regarding the construction of knowledge in qualitative research. I found that my own philosophical views as a researcher seemed to become clearer during the course of the research. As oppose to viewing the accounts given by participants as simply being windows into their lived experiences, I felt that these accounts were also influenced by the social interaction between myself and the participants. As discussed earlier, one of the criticisms of IPA research is that by claiming to say something about the lived experience of participants, this approach overlooks the role of language and social interaction in creating the accounts given in interviews. I feel that my interest in these aspects of the accounts perhaps reflects an underlying epistemological view that emerged during this research, which is that meaning is created both through lived experience and through language. In light of this, I am interested in carrying out research in the future that balances enquiry into lived experiences with an analysis of the role of language in constructing accounts, such as critical narrative analysis (Langdridge, 2007).

As highlighted in the previous section of this chapter, I have learnt about the importance of utilising a methodology that is the right 'fit' for the study. This process has helped me to reflect on the different strengths and limitations of a range of research methodologies. This should help to inform the research choices I make in the future.

I feel that I have developed my understanding of the value of phenomenological research and qualitative research as a whole from undertaking this study. Prior to undertaking the research, I mainly understood the difference between and quantitative and qualitative

research in terms of either having the intention of testing a hypothesis or of exploring an area further. However, this research has helped me to understand the broader potential of qualitative research in stimulating reflection, challenging assumptions and encouraging broader perspectives. I feel I have learnt about the importance of researcher reflexivity in qualitative research to support the trustworthiness and level of insight that is achieved by qualitative research.

### **6.2.2 The influence on my practice as a trainee EP**

Carrying out phenomenological research has helped me to think about the way that I approach knowledge construction and meaning-making in my casework. This has prompted me to distinguish between ways of working that are more exploratory (as with qualitative research and IPA) and times when I work in a more structured or methodical way. I have noticed that some of the times when I have seemed to be more successful in my practice was when I have tried 'not-knowing' and being more open and curious to the viewpoints and understandings of teachers, parents and children. I can see the similarities between this approach and the ways that knowledge is constructed in IPA research, particularly with regards to 'bracketing off' the views and assumptions of the researcher and the emphasis that phenomenologists place on maintaining doubt and uncertainty when looking at phenomena (Langdridge, 2007). As a result of this reflection, I feel the research process has supported the development of my skills in constructing understanding of the experiences of children and young people in school as part of my role as an EP in Training.

I feel that a phenomenological approach may be helpful, at times, in the day-to-day practice of EPs, providing an approach that supports understanding of the lived experiences of children and young people in education. The use of phenomenological reduction (bracketing, verification, horizontalization and verticalization) may be helpful when considering the experiences of children and young people in complex casework. I am interested in exploring these principles further in my practice.

Finally, the use of the diamond ranking activity has also helped me to develop my thinking about how I explore pupil views as part of my practice. I found that this was a useful way to

stimulate conversation and I feel this is an approach that could be a helpful for EPs to adopt when seeking pupil perspectives.

### **6.2.3 Work with LAC in out of authority residential education**

Carrying out this research has challenged my prior assumptions about the experiences of LAC in residential educational placements and has given me a richer understanding of the variety of experiences of LAC in these placements. I feel it has helped challenge a deficit view of LAC in these placements, highlighting their range of experiences as well as the strengths these children and young people may have.

This research has highlighted a number of areas for reflective practice around work with LAC in out of authority residential education, which were discussed in the previous chapter. These areas will be important for me to consider in my practice with LAC in these placements. I am particularly interested in the role of emotional containment within the relationships that LAC experience with supportive adults in these placements.

## **6.3 Summary**

This chapter has provided a reflection on this research. This has included a reflection on the limitations of this study, which has considered the relatively short length of the interviews and how alternative methodologies and approaches could have potentially enhanced this research. This chapter has also considered the ways in which the research has helped promote my own learning and professional development, including how the research has stimulated reflection on my approaches to knowledge construction as part of my educational psychology practice.

## 7 Conclusion

This research has explored the research question ‘What are the experiences of LAC of out of authority educational placements?’ It has highlighted how the experiences of LAC in residential educational settings can range from greater education engagement and stability to difficult feelings that result of being a distance from family and friends.

Five main themes emerged in this study. It was found that participants experienced:

- A distance from home and from emotional intimacy;
- Having no influence on the move out of authority;
- Emotional support or independence and self-reliance;
- Structure, routines and boundaries;
- Normality and a sense of belonging.

This research does not intend to give a generalizable view of the experiences of LAC in out of authority educational placements. However, this research highlights a number of areas for professionals to consider and reflect on in relation to supporting LAC in out of authority residential educational settings. Key areas for professional reflection include:

- The tension between promoting the meaningful participation of LAC in decisions related to their placement in out of authority residential provision and the need to make decisions that also protect the well-being and best interests of LAC.
- The challenge of supporting LAC in residential educational placements to experience close relationships and attachments. This includes consideration of the potential value of secondary attachment figures for LAC in residential educational settings.
- The potential role of providing emotional containment for LAC in residential educational placements within their relationships with supportive adults and through the provision of secure boundaries. This includes reflection on the ways that LAC in these placements prefer to receive support, which could relate to their attachment styles.

- The potential value of increasing the educational engagement of some LAC through residential educational provision. This could relate to the potential of these placements to increase the resilience of some LAC.
- The importance of residential educational settings being able to provide LAC with a sense of belonging. This could influence LAC's experience of these placements as a whole and the overall success of these placements.
- The way that deficit-based constructions of LAC from professional discourse could promote perceptions of the experiences of LAC in residential educational placements that are unrepresentative of the broad range of experiences of LAC in these settings.

In considering the case for residential educational placements for LAC, it has been argued that this research highlights some of the potential advantages of residential educational placements for LAC. These appear to include providing a stable placement, which supports a level of educational engagement that some LAC may not otherwise receive. This research suggests that this experience could have a powerful, transformative impact on the lives of some LAC. However, the present study also highlights difficulties with residential educational placements for LAC. These appear to include the distance of these children and young people from family and other sources of support in their home communities and the difficulties some LAC may experience in adapting to routines and behavioural expectations in these placements.

There is some evidence, therefore, that residential education can be a positive experience for some LAC. However, the individual needs and views of LAC need to be considered carefully in relation to decisions to place them in residential educational provisions. The potential difficulties of these kinds of placements also need to be carefully considered in these decisions. It appears as though the commissioning of residential educational settings in a greater number of local authorities would be helpful. This would potentially enable more LAC to experience the benefits of residential educational provision whilst remaining within their home local authorities.

## 8 References

- Ainsworth, M. D. S. (1989). Attachments beyond infancy. *American Psychologist*, 44, 709-716
- Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Ainsworth, F., & Hansen, P. (2005). A dream come true-no more residential care. A corrective note. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 2005, 14, 195-199
- Arnstein, S. (1969). Eight rungs on the ladder of Citizen Participation. *Journal of the American Institute of planners*, 35 (4), 216-224.
- Baumrind, D. (1991). The Influence of Parenting Style on Adolescent Competence and Substance Use. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 11 (1), 56-95.
- Bion, W. D. (1962). A Theory of thinking. In: Bion (1967) *Second Thoughts*, 110-119, New York: Aronson
- Bowlby, J. (1953). *Child care and the growth of love*. Melbourne: Penguin Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1969) *Attachment and Loss: Vol 1: Attachment*. New York: Basic Books
- Brewin, M., & Statham, J. (2011). Supporting the transition from primary school to secondary school for children who are Looked After. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 27 (4), 365-381.
- British Psychological Society (2009). *Code of ethics and conduct*. Leicester: The British Psychological Society
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Bucknall, S (2007). *Researching young researchers in primary schools: responding to children's evaluations of a participatory technique*. In: British Educational Research Association New Researchers/Student Conference, 5 Sep 2007, Institute of Education, University of London.
- Burden, R. (1997). Translating values into rights: respecting the voice of the child. In: Lindsay and Thompson (1997) *Values into Practice in Special Education*, 136-145, London: David Fulton
- Cairns, K., & British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering. (2002). *Attachment, trauma and resilience: Therapeutic caring for children*. London: British Association for Adoption & Fostering.
- Clark, J. (2012). Using diamond ranking as visual cues to aid young people in the research process, *Qualitative Research Journal*, 12 (2) 222-237.
- Crittenden, P. M. (1985). Maltreated infants: Vulnerability and resilience. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, 26, 85-96.
- Dann, R. (2011). Look out! 'Looked after'! Look here! Supporting 'looked after' and adopted children in the primary classroom. *Education 3-13*, 39, (5), 455-465.



Dent, R. J., & Cameron, R. J. S. (2003). Developing Resilience in Children Who Are in Public Care: The Educational Psychology Perspective. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 19 (1), 3-19.

Department of Health/Department for Education. (1995). The Education of Children being Looked after by Local Authorities. London: DfE/DOH

Department for Education and Employment/Department of Health (2000) *Education of Young People in Public Care*. Guidance. London, DfEE/DoH.

Department of Education/ Department of Health. (2014). *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0-25 years*. Available at [www.gov.uk/government/consultations](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations) (Accessed 22 December 2014)

Finlay, L. (2002). Outing the Researcher: the Provenance, Process and Practice of reflexivity. *Qualitative Health Research*, 4, 531-545

Fletcher-Campbell, F., Archer, T., & Tomlinson, K. (2003). The role of the school in supporting the education of children in public care. Retrieved from <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/>

Geddes, H. (2006). *Attachment in the classroom*. London: Worth Publishing.

Gerhardt, S. (2004). *Why love matters: how affection shapes a baby's brain*. Sussex: Routledge

Gilligan, R. (2007). Adversity, resilience and the educational progress of young people in public care. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 12 (2), 135-145.

Greig, A., Minnis, H., Millward, R., Sinclair, C., Kennedy, E., Towlson, K., Reid, W., & Hill, J. (2008). Relationships and Learning: A Review and Investigation of Narrative Coherence in Looked-After Children in Primary School. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 24 (1), 13-27

Hallet, F., Hallet, G., & McAteer, M. (2007). Every voice matters: evaluating residential provision at a special school. *British Journal of Special Education*, 34(4), 219-225

Harriss, L., Barlow, J., & Moli, P. (2008). Specialist residential education for children with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties: pupil, parent, and staff perspectives. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 13, 1, 31-47

Harker, R., Dobel-Ober, D., Berridge, D., & Sinclair, R. (2004). *Taking care of education: An evaluation of the education of LAC*. London: National Children's Bureau.

Heslop, P., & Abbot, D. (2008). Help to move on-but to what? Young people with learning difficulties moving on from out-of-area residential schools or colleges. *British Journal of learning disabilities*, 37, 12-20

Hopkins, E. (2010). Classroom conditions for effective learning: hearing the voice of key stage 3 pupils. *Improving Schools*, 13, 39-53

Hornby, G., & Witte C. (2008). Follow-up study of ex-students of a residential school for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties in New Zealand. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 13 (2), 79-93

Hopkins, E. (2010). *Classroom conditions for effective learning: hearing the voice of key stage 3 pupils*. Improving Schools, Vol. 13, pp. 39-53.

- Jahnukainen, M. (2007). High-risk youth transitions to adulthood: a longitudinal view of youth leaving residential education in Finland. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29, 637-654
- Jackson, S., & Martin, P. Y. (1998). Surviving the care system: education and resilience. *Journal of Adolescence*, 21 (5), 569-83.
- Jones, L., & Landsverk, J. (2006). Residential Education: examining a new approach for improving outcomes for foster youth. *Children and youth services review*, 28, 1152-1168
- Koltko-Rivera, M, E. (2006). Rediscovering the later version of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Self-transcendence and opportunities for theory, research and unification. *Review of general psychology*, 10, 4, 302-317
- Kvale, S. (2007). *Doing interviews*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Langdridge, D. (2007). *Phenomenological Psychology: Theory, Research and Method*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited
- Larkin, M., Watts, S., & Clifton, E. (2006). Giving voice and making sense in interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2), 102-120.
- Lawler, M.J., Sayfan, L., Goodman, G. S., Narr, R., & Cordon, I. M. (2014). Comprehensive residential education: a promising model for emerging adults in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 38, 10-19
- Lee, B. R., & Barth, R.P. (2009). Residential Education: An emerging resource for improving educational outcomes for youth in foster care? *Children & Youth Services Review*, 31, 155-160.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills: Sage
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2007). Judging interpretations: But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 2007 (114), 11-25.
- Mantle, G. (2007). Managing the tension between child agency and the need for Protection in family court hearings. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 1 (2), 163-175.
- Martin, P. Y., & Jackson, S. (2002). Educational success for children in public care: advice from a group of high achievers. *Child & Family Social Work*, 7 (2), 121-130.
- Maslow, A. H. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being*. Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand
- McGill, P, Tennyson, A., & Cooper, V. (2006). Parents whose children with learning disabilities and challenging behaviour attend 52-week residential schools: their perceptions of services received and expectations of the future. *British Journal of Social Work*, 36, 597-616.
- McGill, P. (2008). Residential schools for children with learning disabilities in England: recent research and issues for future provision. *Tizard Learning Disability Review*, 13, 4, 4-14
- McParlin, P. (1996). Children 'Looked after' (in Care) - Implications for Educational Psychologists: Relentless decades of prejudice, disadvantage and appalling educational outcomes. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 12 (2), 112-117.

- Morse, J., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2008). Verification Strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1 (2), 13-22.
- Morris, J., Abbot, D., & Ward, L. (2003). Disabled Children and Residential Schools: the implications for local education professionals. *British Journal of Special Education*, 30, 70-75
- Northern Ireland DfE (2011). Study into how the education-system can improve the attendance of LAC at post-primary school. Northern Ireland: DfE
- Norwich, B., & Kelly, M. (2006). Evaluating Children's Participation in SEN procedures: lessons for Educational Psychologists. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 22 (3), 255-271.
- Norwich, B., Richards, A., & Nash, T. (2010). Educational psychologists and children in care: practices and issues. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 26 (4), 375-390.
- Ofsted. (2008). LAC – good practice in schools. London: DfE
- Osborne, C., & Alfano, J. (2011). An evaluation of consultation sessions for foster carers and adoptive parents. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 27 (4), 395-413.
- Pellicano, E., Hill, V., Croyden, A., Greathead, S., Kenny, L., & Yates, R. (2014). My life at school: understanding the experiences of children and young people in residential special schools. *Centre for Research in Autism and Education*. Retrieved from [crae.ioe.ac.uk](http://crae.ioe.ac.uk)
- Phillips, J. (2003). Deconstructing 'Sean': The language of prejudice for a child looked after by the local authority. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 20, 64-75.
- Pilling, N., McGill, P., & Cooper, V. (2007). Characteristics and experiences of children and young people with severe intellectual disabilities and challenging behaviour attending 52 week residential special schools. *Journal of Intellectual disability research*, 51,3, 184-196
- Porter, L. (2014). *Behaviour in schools: theory and practice for teachers*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Rockett, M. & Percival, S. (2002). *Thinking for Learning*. Stafford: Network Educational Press.
- Rogers, C. R. (1967). *On becoming a person: a therapist's view of psychotherapy*. London: Constable and Company
- Rutter, M. (1987). Psychosocial resilience and protective mechanisms, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 57, 316-331.
- Ryzin, M.V. (2010). Secondary school advisors as mentors and secondary attachment figures, *Journal of Community Psychology*, 38, 2, 131-154
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects, *Education for Information*, 22, 63-75.
- Slater, R. (2007): Attachment: Theoretical development and critique. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 23, 3, 205-219
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Smith, J. A., & Osborn, H. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In: Smith, J.A. Editor. (2003). *Qualitative psychology: a practical guide to methods*. London: Sage

- Thomas, N., & O'Kane, C. (1999). Experiences of decision-making in middle childhood: The example of children 'looked after' by local authorities. *Childhood*, 6 (3), 369-387.
- Thomson, A. I. (2007). LAC: Non-Local Authority Placements and Meeting Educational Needs. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 23 (3), 273-282.
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989. United Nations Treaty Collection. Retrieved from [treaties.un.org](http://treaties.un.org)
- Visser, J. Cole, T., & Daniels, H. (2002). Inclusion for the difficult to include. *Support for learning*, 17 (1), 23-26.
- Watts, S., & Stenner, P. (2012). *Doing Q Methodological Research: Theory, Method and Interpretation*. London: SAGE
- Watts, S. O'Hara, L., & Trigg, R. (2009). Living with Type 1 diabetes: a by person qualitative exploration. *Psychology and Health*, 25 (4), 491-506.
- Wilson, H. (2002). Brain science, early intervention and 'at risk' families: Implications for parents, professionals and social policy. *Social Policy and Society* 1 (3), 191-202.
- Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

## 9 Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview Scripts

*Script for the start of the interview:*

*I'd like to speak to you about your experiences of coming to this school. I know you used to go to school in xxxxxx and now you go to school here-I'm interested in finding out what you think and feel about this. What I'm interested in is your own views on your experience-there are no right or wrong answers. You can say as much as you like to answer my questions so take as much time as you need.*

*Everything you tell me is confidential so I won't share this with anyone you know and there won't be any names used in my written research. However, if you tell me about something that suggests you might be in danger of harm then I will need to share this information for child protection reasons. I should also explain that this interview is just about finding out about your experiences. I will not be talking to anyone about the interview to try and make any changes in the school.*

*It's completely up to you if you want to take part in the interview and you stop taking part at any point you want to. You don't have to answer any questions you feel you don't want to answer.*

*Have you got any questions?*

*Bullet Points for researcher:*

- Experiences
- Own views-no right or wrong
- Say as much as like
- Confidential
- Child Protection
- Finding out-not making changes
- Up to you- can stop at any point
- Can miss out questions

*Script for the diamond ranking activity:*

*The aim of this activity is to sort statements to show how much you agree with them. Each Statement goes with the opener 'Now that I go to this school...' For example: 'Now that I go to this school, I feel safe and secure'. I am going to ask you to sort the statements into a diamond formation like this (show the statements sorted into a diamond). The statement you agree with most goes at the top, the one you agree with least at the bottom. The further up the diamond the more you agree with the statements, the further down the diamond the less you agree with the statements. Does this make sense?*

*Please sort the statements into your own diamond. Take as much time as you need to do this.*

## Appendix B.1 Interview schedule

1. What is a 'normal' day like here?

*(Prompt: what kind of things do you do? Where do you go? Who do you spend time with? What do you do in lessons? What do you do outside of lessons?)*

2. What kind of things do you like about coming here?

*(Prompt: What have you enjoyed? What positive experiences stick in your mind? Can you tell me about a time when you have been happy here?)*

3. What has helped you? Who has helped you?

4. What kind of things don't you like about coming here?

*(Prompt: What have you disliked? What negative experiences stick in your mind? What problems have you faced? What difficulties have you needed to overcome?)*

5. What have you found difficult? Has anything helped with these difficulties?

6. What do you feel about being in a setting that's quite far from where you used to live?

7. Is coming here like how you expected it to be?

8. How did you feel about coming to this school when you first got here? How do you feel about coming to this school now?

*(Prompt: Did you agree with the decision to come here? What was it like when you first got here?)*

9. What were the reasons for the move? How did you feel about this?

10. If there is anything you could change about what it is like here what would it be?

*(Prompt: If you had 3 wishes what would they be? Why would that be important to you? Is there anything like that now?)*

## Appendix B.2 Interview Schedule for Pilot Study

1. What is a normal day like here?

*(Prompt: what kind of things do you do? Where do you go? Who do you spend time with?)*

2. Was coming here like how you expected it to be?

*(Prompt: what were your thoughts/ feelings about the placement before coming here?)*

3. What is it like coming here compared to where you were before?

*(Prompt: What things are similar? What things are different?)*

4. What is it like for you outside of school time now you are here?

*(Prompt: What do you do outside of lessons? How do you think and feel about these experiences?)*

5. How did you feel about coming to this school when you first got here?

*(Prompt: What did it make you think and feel when you first got here?)*

6. How do you feel about coming to this school now?

*(Prompt: What does it make you think and feel now?)*

7. What is the best thing about coming here?

*(Prompt: What have you enjoyed? What positive experiences stick in your mind? Can you tell me about a time when you have been happy here?)*

8. What is the worst thing about coming here?

*(Prompt: What have you disliked? What negative experiences stick in your mind?)*

9. What has helped you whilst you've been here?

*(Prompt: what has helped you overcome difficulties/ achieve goals/ feel happy?)*

10. What has made it difficult for you when you've been here?

*(Prompt: problems faced/ obstacles to overcome/ things that have got in the way of feeling happy)*

11. What effect do you think coming to this school had on your life as a whole?

*(Prompt: What have you gained/ lost from coming here?)*

12. Do you think this is the best place for you to come to school right now?

*(Prompt: What do you get out of coming here? Would you rather be somewhere different?)*

13. What do you think things will be like for you after you leave here?

*(Prompt: What are your expectations for when you leave here? How is the experience of being here preparing you for the future?)*

## **Appendix C.1 Statements used in diamond ranking activity**

### **Now that I go to this school...**

I feel safe and secure

I feel that people listen to my views

I feel happy

I get on well with others

I enjoy lessons

I am treated fairly

I get the help I need

I have close friends

I like being here

I do things I enjoy



## Appendix C.2 Full list of statements generated for use in the diamond ranking activity before reduction

Learning	Relationships with peers and adults	Pastoral support and care	Overall feelings about current situation
I enjoy lessons in school.	I get bullied.	I can talk to someone about things that are bothering me.	I fit in at this school.
I am learning about things that are important to me.	I have friends in school.	I am treated fairly.	I would rather go to school somewhere else.
I am making good progress with my learning.	I get on well with other young people in school.	I feel accepted and valued for who I am.	I hate being in this school.
I get the kind of help I need in school.	I get on well with adults in school.	I feel understood.	I want to be in a different kind of school.
I need more help with my learning.	I miss friends where I used to live.	I like the way adults in school help me with my behaviour.	I feel safe.
I find it hard to concentrate.	I get on well with the adults who look after me.	I feel cared about.	I have fun.
I work hard.	I find it easy to make friends.	Nobody listens to me.	I am lonely.
	I like the other students here.	My views are important to adults.	I miss friends from where I used to go to school.
		I get into trouble.	I feel anxious or worried.
		Being looked after has a negative effect on my learning.	I never wanted to come here.
		I am happy about where I am living now.	I have a lot on my mind.
		Nobody tells me anything.	I feel angry.
		I am supported to achieve my goals.	I am worried about my future.
		I feel I have settled into where I am living now.	I move around too often.

		I would like more contact with my family.	I find professionals from outside of school helpful (E.g. Social Worker, Educational Psychologist, Counsellors).
		I do things I enjoy outside of school time.	I don't know how long I will be here.
			I am supported by too many different professionals.

## Appendix D.1 Interview transcript for first interview (Callum) with notes

Emerging themes	Transcript for interview	Exploratory notes
<p>Mixed feelings</p> <p>Absence of home</p> <p>Being in a happy place</p>	<p>I: I notice you put 'I am happy here' at the top...what was the reason for putting that at the top now that you go to this school?</p> <p>P: umm I'd rather be happy than always feeling sad and I like it here but sometimes it's a bit upsetting 'cos you're away from home and stuff.</p> <p>I: so it's sometimes a bit upsetting being away from home</p> <p>P: But I'm happy here. It's like it's better to be in a place you're happy with than not happy but I mean...</p> <p>I: Yeah. It sounds like it's a space where you feel like you're happy in this kind of environment compared to perhaps somewhere else where you weren't feeling, feeling like that. Is there anything about here that helps you to feel happy do you think?</p> <p>P: The staff here they're nice. Kids here are nice. You get to do activities a lot. You're never missed out or anything</p> <p>I: You're not missed out.</p> <p>P: No never</p> <p>I: What's nice about the staff?</p>	<p>Dilemma-ambivalence</p> <p>Not at home</p> <p>Not wanting to talk about past-wanting to focus on positives?</p> <p>Different places associated with different feelings of happiness</p> <p>Like a 'retreat'-is this my assumption?</p> <p>Sense of distance between current situation and problems in the past</p> <p>Likes adults/ pupils 'nice' emphasises pleasantness of environment</p> <p>Enjoyment of activities</p> <p>Sense of inclusion</p> <p>Seen as being important/included</p> <p>Happiness-occasional fall outs</p> <p>Likes being around happy staff (links to being a happy place)</p> <p>Others happy to see him-included relationships</p>
<p>Friendly and warm environment</p>	<p>P: Just happy. When you do something wrong that's when you get (laughs) that's when you're not happy with them but just always happy cheerful. Sort things out</p>	<p>'Always happy'-strong expression</p>

Supportive adults Problem solving	for you if you've got anything if there is summat wrong they'll try and sort it out if it's able. Just happy to see ya and stuff. I: That sounds good. Yeah Yeah. Shall we have a look at some of the other ones as well? You've put 'I like being' here underneath. Is there anything you can add to what you said before about why you like being here?	'If it's able'-might hint at unmet difficulties
Caring/ Support	P: No just as I said before really  I: Yeah and I get the help I need?  P: Yeah If I'm upset or something I would probably...come and put their arm around me say 'what's wrong' stuff like that  I: And does that help you to feel a bit better?  P: Yeah	Emotional support from staff- develops what said before
Acceptance of difficulty with work	I: Ok-so you've put I enjoy lessons down at the bottom here (both laugh)  P: I don't like lessons. They are there to be learnt unfortunately...  I: Yeah you have to do them don't you, whether you like them or not. Is that different to where you were before or has it always been a bit like that with you?  P: Just always been a bit like that  I: What don't you enjoy about lessons?  P: (pause) Work	Using humour-adopt 'adult' phrase 'there to be learnt'  Quite closed/leading question from interviewer   Perhaps not wanted to discuss this- interest contrast with

<p>Normality of school life</p>	<p>I: Just having work to do</p> <p>P: Yeah I did a bit but just don't like it</p> <p>I: Is there anything that would make the lessons better for you?</p> <p>P: No they're good. It's always been a thing with me I just don't like 'em.</p> <p>I: Just not your favourite thing to do</p> <p>P: uh-huh</p> <p>I: And you put "I do things I enjoy" on the second row on the bottom down here</p> <p>P: I enjoy things but obviously I do like it but it's just putting the things at the top I like the most</p>	<p>importance of education later A challenge to overcome Constructs of work/learning might be negative</p> <p>General feeling of not liking lessons-a typical adolescent experience? Could have explored more in interview- link to managing feelings?</p>
<p>Importance of fairness/being included</p>	<p>I: So you didn't agree with that one as much but you still kind of agreed with it</p> <p>P: Yeah I still agree with that I do like things here</p> <p>I: What kind of things do you enjoy here?</p> <p>P: Going skating parks um going walks anything that's sporty really I like going into the sports hall umm I like going to the cinema all</p>	<p>Likes activities in school that able to do and appreciates them-not seen as important of overall feeling of happiness/inclusion in placement</p>
<p>Enjoyment of activities</p>	<p>I: So do you get a lot of opportunities to go out and do things like that?</p> <p>P: It's like now it didn't used to be you didn't really got to out during the week you</p>	<p>Change-got to do more later on Being included not missing out Has learnt routine-importance</p>



Trust in staff	<p>I: Yeah It can be a bit annoying sometimes. Does anything help with that if somebody's...?</p> <p>P: Yeah, staff say don't sort it out yourself just tell them so you tell them and they do something about it. Say if like say if someone flicked me I'll just say "sir he's just flicked me he's getting on me nerves can you remove him?" (....?) so he would ask him to go and he probably will go and sit.</p> <p>I: So the adults kind of help you sort things out. That sounds good. And you've got one in the middle here 'I feel safe and secure here'. Is there any reason for that one being there?</p> <p>P: I do feel safe and secure yeah.</p> <p>I: So you feel quite safe when you're here. People listen to my views?</p> <p>P: Yeah definitely</p> <p>I: So, who listens to you?</p> <p>P: Staff here are very good at listening.</p> <p>I: Is that staff in the school or where you live?</p> <p>P: Both, they're very good at listening. Like I said before about feeling happy. If sommat's wrong wi' ya they will try and sort it out if they can</p> <p>I: And does that usually work?</p>	<p>Polite language</p> <p>Emphasising respect for staff</p> <p>Shows trust in staff-structure/provision of security-boundaries</p> <p>Security could be linked to boundaries-predictability of routine</p> <p>Feels listened to</p> <p>Importance of staff listened to-being happy-staff help deal with difficult feelings</p> <p>Staff help with problems</p> <p>Perhaps difficult feelings in past not dealt with leading to running away etc</p>
Supportive staff		
Support for feelings		
Limit to support-but always a willingness		

Being included	<p>P: Yeah</p> <p>I: And you've put 'I'm treated fairly'..</p> <p>P: Like I said before with activities if I don't go out the first night I'll probably go out the second night</p> <p>I: You get a turn</p> <p>P: It's like buggles (?) might go out one night and bobbla (?) might go out one night. You never now how it works because it's like different leaders and stuff.</p> <p>I: And you've got 'I have close friends' in the middle. Was there a reason for putting that one there?</p>	<p>'if they can' recognises limitations to help</p> <p>Likes doing activities-important that get a turn</p> <p>Links fairness to sense of inclusion</p> <p>Predictability and fairness of routines/ structures in setting</p>
Getting on with others	<p>P: No just I do have close friends er no no reason really. Friends that I get on with</p> <p>I: And do you have time to spend with your close friends whilst you're here?</p> <p>P: Yeah we have about an hour and a half just on the front here after school and then we'll go eat together and come back out if you want to or if we're off off-site to the cinema or summat you would go off but you get plenty of time anyway 'cos you see them in school and stuff</p> <p>I: And did you find it easy to make friends when you first got here?</p> <p>P: Yeah</p> <p>I: You found you made friends quite quickly?</p>	<p>Slight contradiction-perhaps not really close friends?</p> <p>Hesitation-perhaps hiding that does not have really close friends</p> <p>Easy to make friends-not the same importance as placed on emotional supportive adults in setting. Some mixed feelings-link to annoyance of peers.</p>
Fitting in	<p>P: Yeah</p>	<p>Shorter answers about friends. Talked more about staff</p> <p>Emphasis towards getting on with rather than real closeness?</p> <p>Sense of belonging and being in</p>



Normal routines	<p>I: An did anyone kind of help you with that or was it just quite natural</p> <p>P: No quite natural. I fit in quite easy.</p> <p>I: That's great. Thanks for that.. I'll put those away. So what's a typical day like here? What kind of things do you do?</p> <p>P: erm weekday or weekend?</p> <p>I: What's a week day like here?</p> <p>P: You get six lessons a day you start at 9:00 and you finish at quarter past three.</p> <p>I: Like a normal school day?</p>	<p>a place where should be-links to being included</p>
Reward systems	<p>P: It's like a normal school day and you'll go to assembly and you get like points if you know what I mean and then if you get full points your name gets read out and then if you get 36 points then.. 'cos you can get. The minimum's 36 for to get on the board and the maximum is 48 and you get points equals money if you know what I mean so every point you get you get a penny.</p> <p>I: Oh right so then you can spend those</p> <p>P: Yeah if you want summat you can go on amazon or something like that</p> <p>I: Oh cool and do you like that kind of reward system in place?</p> <p>P: Yeah yeah</p> <p>I: And you've got lessons for most of the day. What are they like? Are they the</p>	<p>Normal school day</p> <p>Reward systems in school-assembly appears to be an important part of the day-recognising achievements</p>

<p>Movement between classes</p>	<p>same as what you've had before?</p> <p>P: Just the same but different in a way</p> <p>I: How are they different?</p> <p>P: It's like you move around classes more. My old school didn't it's like you were in class and then you'd come back</p> <p>I: Right so you go to different teachers</p> <p>P: You ever heard of X school?</p> <p>I: Yeah I've heard of X school</p> <p>P: They got done didn't they 'cos of smoking or summat</p> <p>I: I think they've had some problems with the site yeah. So do you go to different classrooms and have different teacher's here. And the classes are there quite a small number of students in each class</p> <p>P: Now there's five</p> <p>I: How do you find that?</p> <p>P: Fine</p> <p>I: And is there someone to help you with your work if you need it?</p> <p>P: Yep LSA usually about one or two adults with us in there</p>	<p>Movement around Different teachers-more space?</p> <p>Notices this difference as able to move around.</p> <p>Could create more space to allow for emotional containment-less pressurized environment</p> <p>Distraction-negative comment about old setting. Emphasises being in a positive place now</p> <p>Closed questioning from the interviewer</p> <p>Feels fine about small classes. Could have explored more – what is experience of this?</p> <p>Seems likely to be similar to experience in previous setting. Diff appears to be space between settings-could be an</p>
---------------------------------	---	---

<p>Routines at weekend</p>	<p>I: So what about a weekend then what do you get up to?</p> <p>P: A weekend you would like...you'd go on Friday, go to your house and get all your uniform. Bring it downstairs so you can get it washed and then Saturday staff might have summat planned for ya. So you would get your laundry hang it up and stuff like that. And then Sunday after you've done an activity or whatever you clean your room out and then go on an activity again</p>	<p>important aspect of experience is this researcher's assumption?</p> <p>Talks in some detail about routines. These seem to be of importance?</p>
<p>Enjoyable activities</p>	<p>I: And do you like the weekend activities?</p> <p>P: Yeah</p> <p>I: Can you give me any examples of things you've liked?</p> <p>P: Chill factor- have you ever heard of it? It's a big ski slope in Manchester</p> <p>I: A dry slope presumably? So they've got one over there</p> <p>P: Yeah</p> <p>I: So you go there for the full day</p> <p>P: Yeah and we went other week to Manchester united training thing it's like you get trained by the coaches I think it was for two hours. Not bad.</p> <p>I: That sounds good. And what about the evenings are there things to do then?</p> <p>P: Evenings? Exact same as the weekend really activities</p> <p>I: Stuff going on. Do you usually stay on the site or do you</p>	<p>Does activities that enjoys at weekend</p> <p>Special activities that would not normally access. 'Not bad' recognising that activities are special-not as important as other aspects of experience?</p> <p>Talk about range of activities that engaged in. Interview</p>

<p>Importance of getting an education</p> <p>Being in the placement (stability)</p> <p>Emotionally supported and settles</p>	<p>P: No you go off-site I: What kind of things do you do?</p> <p>P: Erm Cinema, bowling, Lazer quest stuff like that</p> <p>I: Do you enjoy going on those kind of things</p> <p>P: Mmmm</p> <p>I: What kind of things do you like best about coming here would you say?</p> <p>P: Er...I would say getting an education like 'cos at E (previous setting) I wasn't at all. Erm..I was just running around there but I'm getting an education and I'm actually being here now 'cos I used to run away a lot and stuff like that from my old care home so I got moved here so actually not running away anymore or anything</p> <p>I: So your behaviour it sounds like it's more settled (Do you mind if I shut that door?) And you feel like your education is better here- you feel like you're making progress? P: Yeah definitely</p> <p>I: And what's made that difference before between X school and now I mean with your behaviour?</p> <p>P: Staff-it's the staff like if you're angry they'll try and talk you down. At X school you just used to get restrained a lot. Here-they'll talk you down but then if you do something that's like restrainable...that's when they'll restrain you but they'll give a they'll try and talk you down and say don't do that but if it goes a bit iffy diffy after that-that's when they might help ya</p>	<p>more superficial at this point. Less sense of feelings, relationships, significance of activities. Perhaps less important than other aspects of experience-or does this reflect my own interests? Pedantic question</p> <p>Not enjoying lessons (from earlier) but values education. Not anticipated by researcher Running away from home previous impacted on education Previous care instability could have impacted on education? Now not running away-in a more stable place</p> <p>Assumption of researcher-difficulties in past could have related to care home. Assumed difficulty with behaviour in setting Role of adults in supporting feelings Restrain occurs but only when</p>
--	--	--

<p>Support and care of all levels of staff</p>	<p>I: So you have a lot of staff supporting you and talking you through those feelings and was it more quick to go into a restrain before at the setting you were at before</p> <p>P: No 'cos that would just get you more angry</p> <p>I: Yeah-so it's better here that you feel that you are making that progress. Is there anyone in particular you feel has helped you while you've been here?</p> <p>P: Mr N,...(?) J, Mr K, Mr F, J</p> <p>I: Are some of those people- Mr Mis the Headteacher?</p> <p>P: There all like Senior staff. Some of the Senior staff have helped me and some of the school teachers. If I went through them all there would be a massive list</p> <p>I: And is there anything in particular they've done that's helped you?</p> <p>P: Like talk me down. Just helped me said to me oh instead of (umbrage?) come sit in here erm put their arm round when I feel a bit upset. Stuff like that.</p> <p>I: Erm nice things like that. That sounds good. Is there anything you haven't liked about coming here?</p> <p>P: No not really. Yeah I like it here.</p> <p>I: Any difficulties that you've had to overcome on the way? Any challenges that you feel like you've faced whilst you've been here?</p> <p>P: Jumping off waterfalls</p>	<p>needed</p> <p>Talking through those feelings-emotional support</p> <p>Closed question-participant misheard question</p> <p>Supportive staff from high up in the school. Suggests an inclusive/ family style kind of support?</p> <p>Talking about help managing feelings- contrast with restraint</p> <p>Emotional support</p> <p>Could have explored more e.g. particular times</p> <p>Not wanting to talk about difficulties? Highlighting another positive experience</p> <p>Challenge to do with activity</p>
--	---	--

<p>Achievement- experience success</p> <p>of</p> <p>Fairness</p>	<p>I: (laughs) is that something you've done at the weekends?</p> <p>P: You don't do that at the weekends. It's outdoor ed. It's that one in that bottom corner there-this one 'ere (points at picture)</p> <p>I: I can see it so what did you do?</p> <p>P: We like....(?) leap over the water. We like go on outdoor education every Tuesday. There's a class gone out today and there off to a place called Hodge close which is like a big massive quarry. You go down and jump off big massive rocks into water</p> <p>I: Was is a challenge in terms of...?</p> <p>P: fear</p> <p>I: And how do you feel about...?</p> <p>P: I didn't think of it actually. I just ran and jumped (laughs) Because the more I just stand there the more I feel...not good.</p> <p>I: And how did you feel after that?</p> <p>P: Happy-because Mr G goes to us there's only one way down.</p> <p>I: Did you get a choice if you wanted to do that or was it everybody's got to?</p> <p>P: You've got a choice. It's not them telling you -you've got to go up there if you are petrified of heights.</p>	<p>Sense of achievement</p> <p>Descriptive-focusing on important experiences</p> <p>Managing feelings facing up to feelings-parallels to other aspects of experience in setting?</p> <p>Sense of achievement Importance of staff encouragement Not a typical experience but could be an important want sense of achievement</p>
--	---	---

<p>Fairness Secure and caring environment</p> <p>Attachment to home</p> <p>Working out for the best</p>	<p>I: That's sounds like fun (someone walks in-short interruption)</p> <p>I: Is it like how you expected it to be before you got here</p> <p>P: Yeah, yeah-it's a lot different to what I expected it to be. I thought it were gonna be strict. Really strict but it's not at all. It is strict but it's quite lenient in a way.</p> <p>I: Yeah-it is strict sometimes? But not like that all the time.</p> <p>P: yeah</p> <p>I: And were you looking forward to coming here before you came here?</p> <p>P: Not really. I didn't really want to move out of (home town) but..erm I give it chance but it's worked out for me which is good.</p> <p>I: Yeah yeah. You didn't want to come at first. And how did you feel about the decision that was made for you to come here?</p> <p>P: I was upset because I used to live in a kids home before here and erm I lived there for about four years. I was a bit upset that I had to move from there.</p> <p>I: Did you have some connections round there?</p> <p>P: Yeah</p> <p>I: And when the decision was made to you get asked for your view on the move and whether you wanted to move?</p>	<p>Expectations of strictness Recognises a mixture of strictness and leniency Firm but fair-like authoritative parenting? Expected more controlling environment- found it more supportive. Could have explored more- what does participant mean by 'strictness'-suggests firm boundaries</p> <p>Give it a chance-adult type of language Wanting to stay in home town Experience of change Feelings of upset about move-attachment to previous placement</p>
---	--	---

<p>Included in the decision but no say</p> <p>Acceptance and powerlessness about move</p> <p>Antisocial behaviour in previous placement-running into trouble</p> <p>Contentment/</p>	<p>P: erm well in a way I did and in a way I didn't. It were like brought us up and said did you like it and I said oh it sounds nice but I didn't really want to move here know what I mean?</p> <p>I: Yeah. Yeah. So you had conversations about it. Did you feel that people listened to you?</p> <p>P: They did listen to me. I said I don't really want to come but if I have to I have to.</p> <p>I: And it sounds like it's worked out</p> <p>P: Yeah it has.</p> <p>I: And what was the reason for coming here.</p> <p>P: Just from running away. I used to like drink, smoke, do all sorts of things. Just used to get into mischief used to get arrested and stuff like that a lot so</p> <p>I: Do you feel it was the right decision?</p> <p>P: Yeah</p> <p>I: It sounds like a lot of those behaviours before-they've changed</p> <p>P: Yeah</p> <p>I: Is there anything that you would change about your experience here?</p> <p>P: I would say... I'm not too sure actually. What could make it better? Erm. To be honest if I can't think of anything there's nowt to make it better really</p>	<p>Mixed feelings thought the move might be 'nice' but didn't want to experience the change</p> <p>Was told about the move rather than asked Feeling that no choice Listened to but not acted on feelings about move-tokenistic engagement</p> <p>Why different now- what changed? Support of staff in a 'happy' place Previously running away-more vulnerable. Now in a more stable care placement</p> <p>Overall feel that glad about the move</p> <p>Not wanting changes. Happy with the situation-not wanting to talk about negative aspects of the experience?</p>
--	--	---



happiness placement	in	<p>I: Sounds like you quite like things the way they are. So do you think you'll stay here for a bit longer then?</p> <p>P: I'll probably stay here till I leave school more than likely then I'll likely move back to (home town)</p> <p>I: So how do you feel about that? That sounds like a good plan to stay here until you get to the end of year 11?</p> <p>P: Yeah</p> <p>I: How do you feel about being in a school that's a couple of hours away from (home town)?</p> <p>P: Fine cos I go home. I'm off home in the summer for a week which is good so</p> <p>I: So you're ok about that.</p> <p>P: Yeah I'm fine</p> <p>I: Would it be better if there were say a school closer by to (home town)?</p>	<p>Still feel like previous locality is home area</p> <p>Closed question-difficult to answer</p> <p>Maintained links with home. This makes the experience of being away from home easier</p> <p>Short answers-difficult to talk about-also difficult for interviewer to explore with participant?</p>
Acceptance placement	of	<p>P: Yeah. I would like to be close but I like it here.</p> <p>I: Is there anything else about your experience here that you'd like to tell me about that is important to you?</p> <p>P: No not really</p>	<p>Seems like the environment and support that receives is more important than the difficulties experienced from being away from home.</p> <p>Could have explored this aspect of the experience a bit more</p>

	I: Closes interview	<p>Maintains sense of 'home' in previous locality.</p> <p>Refers back to being in a happy place-likes to present self and situation as a happy one. Could be participant's preferred version of experience.</p> <p>Links problems difficulties to previous settings places-significance of places and feelings associated with them.</p>
--	---------------------	--

## Appendix D.2 Emerging themes from interview transcript 1

Feeling happy	Fitting in with peers group	Importance of staff for emotional support
Being in a happy/ pleasant place	Peers can be annoying	Support from all levels of staff
Away from home	Trust in staff to solve problems	Achievements and success
Some mixed feelings	Support for difficult feelings	Fairness of school
Feeling included/important	Some difficult feelings remain	Not wanting to move from home
Supportive adults	Generally getting on with others	Working out for the best
Helping/ problem-solving	Normal routines	Being heard but powerless in decision to move
Caring environment	Rewards and achievements	Acceptance of situation from the start
Normal school experience	Movement and space	Anti-social behaviour in past
Importance of fairness/ being included	Getting an education	Links with home
Enjoyment of activities	No longer running away	
Doing 'special' activities	Problems with old setting	

## Appendix E. 1 Superordinate and emergent themes in interview 1

Interview 1: Callum

Super-ordinate theme	Emergent theme	Key words	Page/line
Tensions between overall positive changes in life situation and some difficult feelings remaining	Anti-social behaviour in past	Used to drink, smoke...get arrested	12.244
	No longer running away	I used to run away a lot	8.169
	Problems with old setting	Used to get restrained a lot	9.77
	Things working out for the best	It's worked out for me	11.225
	Getting an education	Getting an education	8.187
	Keeping links with home	Off home for a week in summer which is good	12.261
	Feeling happy	I'm happy here	1.6
	Some difficult feelings beyond support	Sort it out if it's able	1.20
	Mixed feelings about being away from home	Sometimes upsetting Away from home	1.3
	Being in a happy/ pleasant place	Better be in a place you're happy with than not	1.6
Being in a supportive, caring and inclusive environment	Importance of staff for emotional support	Come put their arm around me	2.26
	Support for difficult feelings	They try sort it out	4.87
	Trust in staff to solve problems	You tell them and they do something about it	4.73
	Support from all levels of staff	Senior staff teachers massive list	9.188
	Caring environment	If it goes iffy diffy they might help ya	9.179
	Helping/ problem-solving	Very good at listening	4.84
	Supportive adults	Talk you down	9.177
	Feeling valued	Happy to see ya	1.20
	Fairness of school	Strict but lenient in a way	10.221
	Friendly staff	Always happy cheerful	1.6
Established routines that include enjoyable and rewarding activities	Importance of fairness/ being included	Never missed out	1.12
	Opportunities to do special activities	Manchester United training not bad	8.156
	Enjoyment of activities	Never bored	3.59
	Always included/ getting a turn	You definitely doing sommat that week	3.56
	Presence of routines	House, uniform, laundry, activities	7.144
	More movement between classes	You move around classes more	6.129
	Normal school day	Six lessons...go to assembly	6.116
	Rewards in school	Full points names read out	6.118
	Facing fears	Fear...Jumping off waterfalls	9.198

Generally fitting in, getting on with others and school life	Generally getting on with others	I do get on with others	3.62
	Fitting in with peer group	I fit in quite easy	5.109
	Peers can be annoying	It's like leave me alone	3.62
	Not enjoying lessons but getting on with them.	Lessons...there to be learnt unfortunately	2.31
Facing a challenging move but accepting changes	Not wanting to move from home	Didn't want to move	11.225
	Upset about move	I was upset	11.229
	Being heard but powerless in decision to move	If I have to I have to	11.240
	Acceptance of move from the start	I give it a chance	11.225

## Appendix E. 2 Superordinate and emergent themes in interview 2

Interview 2: Craig

Super-ordinate themes	Themes	Key words	Page/ Line
Positive changes from the move	Move for the best Negative experience of past care  Making some progress in behaviour Feeling of belonging/ security	I am happy with the decision Like previous care home...not too nice  I would say so yeah I feel like that Feeling like meant to be there	19.14 20.11  19.3 3.10 20.12
Generally feeling happy with things as they are	Generally happy Some mixed feelings Content with things as they are Feeling settled Generally getting on with others	It's nice being here/ I just enjoy it Most of the time. Sometimes I don't It's fine I've been alright I get on well with others	14.5/ 18.3 14.9 21.3 18.14 15.12
Supported by others and by structures in setting	Feeling supported Supportive community Support to manage feelings and behaviour  Liking variety of teachers  Liking small classes	I do get the support that I need Everybody really/ Everyone helps each other Anything that's the matter Any problems I have everyone helps How deal with stuff You don't have to put up with them in another lesson I prefer small classes	13.15 15.26/ 18.16  13.17 18.18 19.1 16.13 17.5
Challenges with move	Not involved in decision Nervous when first move	It was going to happen anyway Nervous at first soon settled in	19.10 19.18
Accepting of not having a close friendship group	Sometimes spend time with others Focusing on work Only one close friend Friends not important in school Acceptance/ tolerance of lack of close friends	Sometimes yeah Not interested them focus work The only one I live with Don't really chat...not so important I'm quite used to it	17.19 15.15 14.17 14.12 14.20

Engaging in some enjoyable activities	Liking to keep self occupied	I don't like sleeping. I like to do something	17.17
	Engaging in some interests	couple activities interested in	15.1
	Relaxation in evenings	relax sit around	17.11

## Appendix E. 3 Superordinate and emergent themes in interview 3

Interview 3: Sam

Super-ordinate theme	Theme	Key Words	Page/ Line
Emotionally self-contained and self-empowered	Toughness/ Neutrality Choosing when to go to lessons Closed off in interview Would not want to do counselling Not talking to staff about feelings/ issues	I feel safe wherever I am If I want to I'll go Fine...Yep...Nope No I wouldn't do it I don't talk to people that much	22.3 23.15 27 27.9 25.17
Normal experience of school life	Normal boarding school experience Activities enjoyed but not particularly valued Staff just doing their jobs Normal friendships Not minding it Typical experience of lessons Not experiencing problems	It's just a boarding school I do loads of stuff I enjoy I just enjoy it It's their job innit Nice just lads/ Just friends I don't mind it here They're just lessons Fine	26.12 22.12 24.2 26.20 22.8/ 22.10 22.14 24.6 26.10
Powerlessness in move	Powerless to resist move Need to accept move  Forced to move	I'd get dragged here Don't want to be dragged so I just come  I had to come.	26.2 26.3  26.2
Wanting to be home	Wanting to be in Xxxxxxx  Home is Xxxxxxx Anger about being away from home	I don't really want to be here Just rather be in Xxxxxxx At home I just would where live where from	22.21 25.9 22.22 23.4
Problems in past	Not attending school in past	Didn't really go	23.11



## Appendix E. 4 Superordinate and emergent themes in interview 4

Interview 4: Andrew

Super-ordinate Themes	Emergent Themes	Key Words	Line/ Page numbers
Wanting to be back in Xxxxxxx with family and friends	Strongly disliking being away from Xxxxxxx Wanting to be back with friends and family Disappointed by lack of contact with family Not wanting to get in touch with family	I'm like what 60 miles from Xxxxxxx My mates and my family  Not seen none of them but my sister  I don't want to	30.12 37.6  37.6  37.11
Feeling that personal freedoms have been limited in this setting	Lost freedoms Strict boundaries in setting Adults provide discipline and boundaries School too strict Limited freedoms Wanting to be outside of school Dislike of school Running away in the past	I can get served in Xxxxxxx If I don't get my head down kick off get held It's mostly get back to lessons It's not that fair no Not being able to smoke Just run off School is just crap I am not normally in school-I just run off	30.18 34.10 35.10 35.13 35.20 33.5 33.1 32.8
Being a rule-breaker/ rogue	Not getting on with adults Breaking rules/ transgressions Showing interviewer that can't be controlled Collision with boundaries and authority Rule-breaking behaviour Pushing boundaries Use of humour in interview	Not well They don't like me swearing...smoking ...chased 'em with a knife last time  No-one can stop me doing whatever I do I go for a cig with him I'll just have a cig in front of them ...didn't work	30.3 30.5 36.20  32.13 35.5 35.22 31.9
Having a supportive peer group	Friends in setting Not as close as friends from before move Support from friends to succeed Friends only important thing in setting	No He says calm down and just chill out My mates-that's it	28.8 35.5 33.17

	Getting on with peers	Yeah Yeah	34.1
Anger about the way the move happened	Anger about move Deception of adults Unhappy about move	Tried to set car on fire They packed my bags saying cleaning room Shit	31.7 31.1 31.4
Finding some advantages to the new setting	Doing more enjoyable activities Activities just for enjoyment Pleased with making progress Some more freedom/ understanding in setting Made to sit in isolation in past	Go football...snooker Yeah Levels getting better...alright I don't have to sit in a room  I just sit in a room	28.17 29.17 34.7 31.22  29.10

## **Appendix F A comparison of themes across all four interviews**

### **In all interviews:**

Feeling powerless to influence the move to a setting out of authority  
Feeling upset/ angry about the move at the time  
Fitting in but not really close friends  
Continued presence of difficult feelings from the move  
Coping strategies that enable to manage change (different across all cases)  
Difficulties in previous situations

### **In majority of interviews (3/4):**

A feeling of being 'away from home' (1,3,4)  
Normal school routines and experiences (1,2,3)  
Fitting in and adapting to a new situation (1,2,3)  
Access to enjoyable activities (1,3,4)  
Negative feelings towards previous setting (1,2,4)  
Experience of more understanding/ support in new setting (1,2,4)  
Coping strategies for emotional difficulties (1,2,4)  
Accepting of situation (1,2,3)  
Running away from/ not attending previous settings (1,3,4)  
Experience of success/ progress in learning or behaviour (1, 3, 4)

### **Strong themes in a minority of interviews (two or less)**

Feeling of self-reliance-not needing support (3)  
Missing friends and family (4)  
Limits to freedom (4)  
Mixed feelings about move: happy generally but some upset feelings (1 and 2)  
Feeling move for the best (1 and 2)  
Positive life changes (1 and 2)  
Wanting to be back in Xxxxxxx (3 and 4)  
Difficulties in previous care situation (2)

### **Contrasts between interviews:**

Feeling move for the best/ positive life changes vs wanting to go home (1,2 vs 3,4)  
Accepting change vs anger about change (1,2,3 vs 4)

Emotional support of adults vs peer support (1,2, vs 3,4)

Feeling 'where meant to be' vs feeling away from home (2 vs 1,3,4)

Valuing support of adults vs not valuing adults (1,2 vs 3)

Feeling supported vs Feeling oppressed (1,2 vs 3)

Being self-reliant vs valuing support (3 vs 1,2,4)

## **Appendix G A comparison of emerging themes across cases using quotations**

\*Note-I continued to develop these themes during the writing of the analysis. Hence, these are not the final themes in the analysis

### **A. Feelings about home/ where meant to be**

#### **Feeling that away from home**

1: *It's a bit upsetting 'cos you're away from home and stuff*

3: *It's where I live. It's where I'm from. I'd rather be there (Xxxxxxx)*

4: *I'm like what 60 miles from Xxxxxxx*

#### **Feelings that this is where meant to be**

2: *I was expecting it to be like one of my previous care homes. Not too nice. Not getting the most amount of support. Not feeling like I'm meant to be there. (It's) completely the opposite.*

#### **Feelings about the move from home**

1: *"I was upset because I used to live in a kids home before here and I lived there for about four years. I was a bit upset that I had to move from there"*

#### **Missing Friends and Family**

4: *"My mates and my family. Not seen none of them but my sister"*

### **B. The lack of influence or control over changes in placement**

#### **Having no influence in move:**

1: *"I said I don't really want to come but if I have to I have to"*

2: *"It was sort of like it was going to happen anyway"*

3: *"I didn't want to come here but I had to come."*

#### **Feeling deceived and badly treated:**

4: *"They packed my bags saying they were cleaning my room. Then into the car and took me here."*

4: *"Tried to set the car on fire...didn't work"*

#### **Acceptance of placement**

1: *"I give it a chance"*

1: *"I said I don't really want to come but if I have to I have to"*

#### **Accepting to lack of control over situation:**

3: *"I don't really want to be here but I have to be here"*

3: *"I'd get dragged here but I don't really want to be dragged here so I just come."*

### **C. Making adjustments to a new life situation**

#### **Emotional acceptance of situation**

- 1: *"I'm happy here. It's better to be in a place you're happy with than not happy"*
- 2: *"At the time (of the move) not too happy but I am happy with the decision"*
- 2: *"I just enjoy it...it's just a school"*
- 3: *"I don't mind it here- it's just a boarding school"*

#### **Adapting to the new situation**

- 1: *"I fit in quite easy"*
- 2: *"I was nervous at first but soon settled in"*
- 2: *"I'm quite used to it"*
- 3: *"I feel safe wherever I am"*

### **D. Feelings about relationships and support**

#### **Forming friendships but with a lack of special closeness**

- 2: *"The only one I do (feel close to) is J who I live with. And that's it really"*
- 2: *"It's not really important in school...I don't really chat with them so much so it's not really important"*
- 3: *"Just friends...not best friends, just my friends rather"*

#### **The availability of emotional support in the setting**

- 1: *"If I was upset or something they would probably come put their arm around me say "what's wrong" stuff like that"*
- 1: *"Some of the senior staff have helped me and some of the school teachers. If I went through them all there would be a massive list"*
- 2: *"Everyone really helps each other...any problems I have everyone helps"*
- 3: *"If I need to talk to someone I just talk to someone. But I don't talk to people that much."*
- 4: *"If I go out of lesson. I go for a 'cig with him. He says calm down go back in lesson. Get your head down and just chill out"*

### **E. The presence of structure and boundaries**

#### **Being in school and getting an education**

- 1: *"..running away. I used to drink, smoke, do all sorts of things...get arrested"*
- 3: *"I didn't really go (to school)"*
- 4: *"I am not normally in school-I just run off"*

1: *" (the best thing) I would say getting an education 'cos at (previous setting) I wasn't at all. I was just running around there but I'm getting an education and I'm actually being here now"*

4: *"My levels are getting better...(I feel) alright. I mean, I missed the whole of year seven."*

#### **The provision of physical and emotional space in the setting**

1: *"At (former school) you just used to get restrained a lot. Here they'll talk you down"*

4: *"I just sit in a room" (in former school)*

1: *"You move around classes more"*

2: *"I like it. 'Cos you know it's better than having one teacher for all lessons. Because if you are not getting on with them in one lesson then you don't have to put up with them in another lesson. You always know that you are going to another teacher."*

#### **Presence of routine and structure**

1: *"You're definitely doing sommat"*

1: *"Never bored"*

#### **Collision of boundaries and personal choices**

3: *"If I want to, I'll go (to lessons). If I don't, I don't go."*

4: *"They obviously don't like me swearing. They don't like me smoking"*

4: *"If I don't get my head down I kick off. I get held"*

4: *"School is crap"*

#### **Collision of boundaries and behaviour (causing unsafety)**

4: *"No one can stop me doing whatever I do"*

## **Appendix H Participant information Sheet**

### **Introduction**

Hello, my name is Michael. I am an Educational Psychologist in Training. I am inviting you to take part in a research project I am carrying out with LAC. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please take time to decide whether or not you would like to take part in this study. Thankyou for reading this.

### **Title of my project:**

How do young people in local authority care view their experiences of educational placements outside of the local authority?

### **What is the project's purpose?**

The aim of the project is to find out about the views of LAC on their educational experiences. This study is interested in the views of young people in the care of Xxxxxx local authority who attend educational settings that are outside of Xxxxxx. My research aims to help people who work in education and social care to better understand the experiences of young people who are in this situation.

### **Why have I been chosen?**

You are being asked to take part as you are a young person who is in care of Xxxxxx local authority and you attend an educational setting that is outside of Xxxxxx. I am hoping to meet and interview between three and five different young people of Secondary School age in my study. I hope to speak to young people to get their views between May 2014 and July 2014.

### **Do I have to take part?**

It is completely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You can still decide not to take part at any time even after completing the consent form. You do not have to give a reason for not taking part in the study.

### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

I will arrange to meet with you in your school or setting. I should only need to meet with you once and this should take less than one hour. I will ask you to order a set of statements according to how much you agree with them. I will then ask why you have put the statements in this order. After this, I will ask you some questions to find out more about your views on your experiences in this setting. These will be questions like 'How do you feel about being in this setting?' and 'What sort of things do you like/ don't like about being in this setting?' You will not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

### **Will anything be anything be recorded?**

I will record the interview using an electronic voice recorder. This recording will not contain any names and will be destroyed once the research is completed.



**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

It is possible that taking part in the study could lead to difficult feelings if the interview brings to mind an experience you would prefer not to think or talk about. In case of this, I will ensure there will be a familiar adult available to speak to you following the activity if you would like this. You will also be free to stop taking part in the interview at any point if you would prefer this.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

You won't get any money or rewards in school for taking part in the project. Taking part will give you the opportunity to contribute your views about your current educational placement towards this research. This research aims to help promote understanding of the views of children in care who are educated outside of their home local authority.

**What will happen to the information I give you?**

All the information you give me will be kept confidential. I will keep this in a safe place where no one has access to it but me. When I write up the research I will not use any names. There will be no information included in my written report that could identify any young people taking part in the study, their families or their school setting. My written research will be kept at the university and will be available online. The research may be published at a later date.

**Who has checked to make sure the project will not be harmful to participants?**

The ethics boards at Sheffield University and Xxxxxx Educational Psychology Service have checked my project to ensure it does not present a risk of harm to participants.

**What if something goes wrong?**

If you are unhappy about anything during the research experience you should contact my research supervisor. His name and details are below.

Martin Hughes

Educational and Child Psychology Course Tutor

Department of Education, University of Sheffield, Glossop Road, Sheffield S102JA

E-mail: [m.j.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:m.j.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk)

Phone: 0114 2228177

**What if I want further information?**

Please contact me if you would like further information on this project. My details are below:

Michael Chisholm

Educational Psychologist in Training  
Adams Court, Kildare Terrace, Xxxxxx, LS12 1DB  
E-mail: michael.chisholm@xxxxxx.gov.uk  
Phone: 0113 3951039

Please feel free to keep this information sheet. **Many thanks for reading this information and thankyou and for taking part in the project if you decide to do so.**

## Appendix I.1 Participant Consent Form

**Title of Project:** How do LAC view their experience of educational placements outside of their home local authority?

**Name of Researcher:** Michael Chisholm

**Participant Identification Number for this project:**

### To be completed by Participant

**Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. ☐
3. I understand that my name and any identifying details about me will not be included in the written findings of this research. ☐
4. I agree to take part in the above research project. ☐

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant  
(or legal representative)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person taking consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Designation of person taking consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Lead Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Copies:

*Once this has been signed by all parties a copy of the signed and dated consent form will be placed in the project's main record which will be kept in a secure location.*

## Appendix I.2 Social Worker Consent Form

**Title of Project:** How do children in local authority care view their experience of educational placements outside of the local authority?

**Name of Researcher:** Michael Chisholm

**Participant Identification Number for this project:**

**To be completed by Social Worker**

**Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet (dated  ) for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

5. I give permission for.....(Name of Young Person) to take part in the above research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## Appendix I.3 Parent Consent Form

**Title of Project:** How do children in local authority care view their experience of educational placements outside of the local authority?

**Name of Researcher:** Michael Chisholm

**Participant Identification Number for this project:**

**To be completed by Parent**

**Please initial box**

2. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet (dated  ) for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

6. I give permission for.....(Name of Child) to take part in the above research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## Appendix J Feedback to Participants

Dear xxxxxxxxxxxx,

I would like to thank you once again for participating in my research project last summer on the experiences of young people in care on educational placements outside of their home local authority. I am just writing to you now to provide some brief feedback on the outcomes from the research.

The conversations I had were very helpful in supporting my research and helping me to understand the range of experiences of young people in this situation better. I will be sharing my research with professionals, like social workers and educational psychologists to support their thinking about work with young people in similar situations.

### **Summary of the research**

The title of the research is: Understanding the experiences of looked after children in educational placements outside of their home local authority

Four young people of secondary school age took part in this study. All of the participants in the study were young people in care who were attending residential educational placements that were outside of their home local authority.

There was a lot of variety in the experiences of the young people participating in this study. Here are some of the main themes that came from the interviews (these are intended to reflect all four interviews in some way and not just your interview).

- Some of the young people seemed to experience more structure and boundaries in their placements than they had previously. This meant gaining positive experiences related to their education and making academic progress.
- Some participants talked about feeling away from close relationships. A number of the participants felt that their closer relationships were with their friends and families in their home towns.
- Participants spoke about not being involved in the decision the move to the placement or of not being able to make a meaningful contribution to this decision. Some of the young people felt the move was for the best but others wished to return to their home town.
- Some of the young people spoke about feelings of belonging, fitting in and of normality in their placement. However, some participants did not experience this, feeling they did not fit in well and missed things they were able to do in their earlier lives.
- The young people had different experiences of emotional support in their placements. Some participants valued the support from adults in the settings. However, others preferred to be more independent in their placement.

The findings from the study highlight a range of areas that will be very helpful for professionals to consider when planning support for young people in similar situations. I am

very grateful for your contribution to this project. If you have any questions or feedback about this please feel free to contact me using the details above.

Best wishes  
Michael

Michael Chisholm  
Educational Psychologist in Doctoral Training

## Appendix K Summary of Research for Settings

This information sheet is professionals is intended for professionals and carers who work with looked after children, including Setting Staff, Social Workers, Teachers and Educational Psychologists. It provides a summary of the main findings of my research, which was carried out as part of a doctoral program in Educational and Child Psychology at the University of Sheffield.

### Research title:

Understanding the experiences of looked after children in educational placements outside of their home local authority: an interpretative phenomenological analysis.

### Methodology:

This research is a small scale qualitative study. Data was gathered through interviews with four participants of secondary school age. All participants were looked after children attending residential educational placements that were outside of their home local authority. The methodology used this study was IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis). This is an exploratory study. The findings are not intended to be generalised to broader populations, but offer areas to consider for professionals working with looked after children in educational placements outside of their home local authority.

### Findings:

There was a lot of variety in the experiences of the young people who took part in the study, which highlights the importance of considering the needs of young people in this situation on an individual basis. However, five main themes emerged in the analysis, which are described below.

#### *Feelings about belonging and fitting in:*

A number of participants found that they experienced a sense of belonging and fitting in with peers and staff in the setting. Participants who felt a sense of acceptance and fitting seemed to be happier in the placement as a whole. This feeling was also expressed by participants as a sense of normality. However, some participants felt less belonging and missed familiar routines from their earlier lives.

#### *The experience of emotional support:*

Some participants valued the support of key adults in the settings, which helped them to be happy in their placements. The research suggests that for some looked after children in out of authority placements there may be an important role for adults in providing emotional containment. However, others participants preferred to be more independent and said they did not feel a need for emotional support, which could reflect the attachment styles of the young people. Some participants valued the support of adults whereas others preferred support from their peers.

#### *The experience of a distance from close relationships:*



A number of participants did not experience very close relationships in the setting. In most cases, the participants felt that their closer ties were with their friends and families in their home towns. Participants experienced this in different ways: some feeling they would rather be with the people they are closer to in their home areas and others feeling that the advantages of being in the setting made the placement worthwhile.

*The experience of structure and boundaries:*

Some participants spoke about the presence of more structure and boundaries in their current placement than they had experienced in their earlier lives. A number of the participants spoke about gaining a positive of education and of making academic progress as a result of the placement. For some participants this provided a valuable experience they had not had previously. This seems to highlight the potential advantage for some looked after children of residential placements in providing structure and a secure base, which can offer the possibility of positive educational experiences.

*Not participating in the decision to move:*

A number of participants found that they did not contribute in a meaningful way in the decision the move to the out of authority setting. Some participants spoke about not wanting to move at the time of the transition but of feeling that the move had worked out for the best. This theme appeared to highlight the tension between giving young people agency in a decision that affect their lives and the protective role of responsible adults in making a decision that is felt to be in their best interest.

Thankyou for taking the time to read this. If you would like to discuss this research with me further, please contact me using the details below.

Michael Chisholm  
Educational Psychologist in Doctoral Training

Adams Court  
Kildare Terrace  
Leeds  
LS12 1DB

Tel: 0113 3951039  
[Michael.Chisholm@Leeds.gov.uk](mailto:Michael.Chisholm@Leeds.gov.uk)